Commentary

VOLUME EIGHTY-FOUR • NUMBER SIX • DECEMBER 1987

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INVENTING THE HOMOSEXUAL
Marjorie Rosenberg

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Books in Review
Michael Ledeen / William H. Youngren / Jonathan D. Sarna / David Brock / Roger Kimball

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Letters from Readers

Journalistic Ethics

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Suzanne Garment's cautious and curiously unfocused piece on the media, "Can the Media Be Reformed?" [August], seems to suggest that the profession of journalism has no code of ethics, but that practice varies according to the character of the individual journalist. Professional pressure of one kind or another, plus a certain pragmatism illustrated by some nostrums from Sam Donaldson, would seem to determine the ethical tenor of the journalist's approach to his job.

In fact, the journalistic profession does have a clear operational code of ethics, which is fairly consistent throughout the free world, but is not set down in any of the various "codes of practice" issued by unions, publications, or other professional groups. Because of the curious constitutional position of American journalism, the code is practiced almost in its entirety in the U.S. In other countries, such as Britain, legal restrictions generally prevent the operation of the code to its fullest extent. . . .

This code was published in the December 1986 issue of *Encounter*, in my own discussion of journalistic ethics, . . . which I wrote, as it were, from inside the profession (my experience goes back more than twenty years and covers radio, television, and print). . . . The actual, as opposed to the mooted, ethical code of journalism is summed up in these nine rules:

Rule 1 (the *sine qua non*): Attract the attention of the public. Without this attention there can be no communication, and the profession of journalism cannot exist. Any reasonable means are permissible, and "reasonable" shall be defined by professional journalists (this includes editors and publishers) and *no one else*.

Rule 2: All coverage—politics, governmental affairs, private lives, military operations, commercial matters, and every other category without exception—may be obtained in a manner to be determined by the professional journalist and *no one else*. His criterion shall always be the public interest, which will include the interest (i.e., curiosity) of the public. In cases of dispute, that public interest shall be defined by the professional journalist and *no one else*.

Rule 3: If the subject of coverage wishes to reply, his right of access through the media shall be determined by the professional journalist and *no one else*. Any outside attempt to interfere with this discretion shall be construed as an attack upon the freedom of the media and publicized as such.

Rule 4: There is no such thing as an abuse of press freedom. Any attempt to apply this term to the practice of journalism in any medium shall be construed as an attack on the freedom of the press and an insult to democracy, and publicized as such.

Rule 5: Terms of honesty, truth, morality, justice, and all other such value judgments shall be determined by professional journalists and *no one else*, where they involve the practice of journalism. The criterion shall always be the public interest (see Rule 2).

Rule 6: Any attempt by any person or body, private or public (especially the government), to invoke any legal restraint upon the practice of journalism, whether it be through new or old laws of libel and slander, through censorship, official or unofficial, or through appeals to discretion, decency, or other such arbitrary terms, shall be construed as an attack upon the freedom of the press, an insult to democracy, and the destruction of the people's right-to-know, and publicized as such. N.B.: professional journalists may themselves have recourse to libel and slander actions at their discretion.

Rule 7: Freedom, democracy, and the people's right-to-know are synonymous with the unfettered practice of journalism. Any suggestion that this identity is anything other than absolute shall be construed as an attack upon the foundations of democracy, and publicized as such.

Rule 8: The professional journalist shall normally be responsible to *no one* but his colleagues as defined above (see Rule 1). In certain circumstances he shall be responsible to the law; these circumstances shall be determined by professional journalists and *no one else*. Any attempt to do so by anyone outside the profession of journalism shall be construed as an attempt to destroy democracy, and publicized as such.

Rule 9: The discretion of professional journalists in all matters

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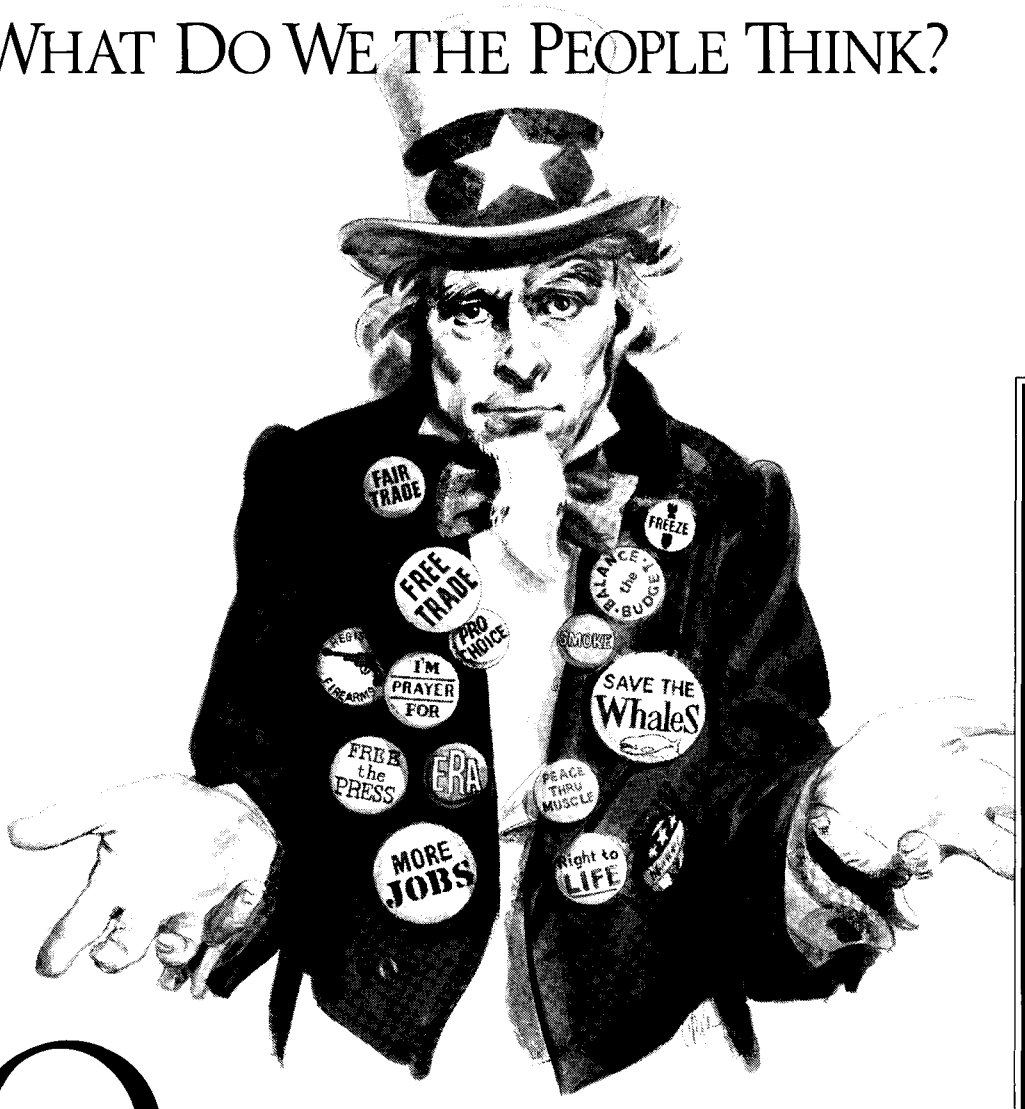
The People, the Press & Politics

WHAT DO WE THE PEOPLE THINK?



Once upon a time it was all very simple. All we really had to care about was which party we belonged to, Republican or Democratic. We knew what these parties stood for, and what it meant to be a "liberal" or a "conservative."

But somewhere between the Cold War and the computer-on-a-chip, something happened:

Democrats started sounding like Republicans, and vice versa. Liberals became too conservative for some; conservatives too liberal for others.

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covered by these rules of ethics is absolute. Any suggestion to the contrary shall be construed as an attack on freedom, democracy, and the people's right-to-know, and publicized as such.

The problems arising in the practice of journalism—unfairness (according to non-journalists, of course), public outrage, invented "news" *à la* Janet Cooke—stem generally from the application of this code under the pressures of the media profession in a free society. The most intense of these is competition, closely followed by the sort of ideological warping discussed by S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter in their excellent book *The Media Elite*.

The central point of this discussion ought to be not whether journalists behave badly or not, but whether, given that a relatively small part of their profession now serves to *inform* (rather than entertain, shock, or satisfy the idle curiosity of) the public, journalists should continue to enjoy the benefit-of-clergy status conferred on them by the American legal system. Why not discuss, for example, whether journalistic practice is not restricted by the Fourth Amendment and its guarantees against unreasonable search and seizure? That amendment does not confine its restrictions to government officers but is quite general. The Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process has also repeatedly been violated by journalists.

It really is not enough to lament vaguely, as Mrs. Garment does, that journalistic malpractice is unfortunate and that there should be some means of defense. The fact that *any* group should claim total exemption from the normal restraints which bind the rest of society is not an expression of freedom; it is an expression of lynch law, and ought to be seen squarely as such. The final justification given by journalists for even the grisliest of their capers is no more complex than the-end-justifies-the-means. We all know where that leads, and we know also that the end is by no means as clear-cut as the most self-righteous of our journalists would have us believe.

HERB GREER

Manchester, England

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In considering the agonizing of the press in the wake of the Gary Hart debacle, Suzanne Garment seems kinder than necessary. The same people who lament press recklessness in staking out Hart have not suggested that the equally ruthless and openly ideological destruction of James Watt and other ex-members of the administration who also found reporters hanging from trees, cross-examining their children, and the like was a bad idea. . . .

Hart finally removed himself (we are told) because the Washington *Post* informed his people that unless he quit it was going to reveal another—and possibly juicier—scandal. So he quit, and the newspaper did not go public with the story. But does anyone imagine that the same offer would have been made to a Republican candidate? What seems to be the case is that the *Post* already had all the dirt and more, but Hart was as safe with the *Post* as John F. Kennedy had been until the Miami *Herald* forced the issue into the open. That compelled competitive action. But it is notable that even then—and until now—the *Post* has not delivered the whole story. So it would appear that the rules have not changed quite so much as Suzanne Garment suggests. For Republicans, they have not changed at all.

SAUL DAVID

Van Nuys, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

For a long time I have shared Suzanne Garment's frustration with the American media and have wondered if anything can be done in the way of reform. She appreciates the fact that the "grinding and sometimes panicking pressure of time prevents journalists" from putting their ideas into anything but "a few basic, simple categories."

The standard answer to this problem, which she rightly dismisses as unrealistic, is to pay "attention to the education that [media persons] receive before they take up their jobs." . . . But anyone can learn at any time, . . . and it is a lack of curiosity, an unwillingness to learn, that I think is the source of most mediocrity in today's popular media. . . .

It seems to me that most popular journalists spend too much time reading and watching others with a similar slant who cover the same events. And public leaders appear to follow suit. One shock I had in the course of the Iran-*contra* hearings was that committee members cited *Time*, *Newsweek*, and TV commentators as reliable sources. Seldom if ever did I hear anyone cite Jeane Kirkpatrick . . ., for example, or such diverse sources as COMMENTARY or *Reason*. The Washington *Post* and the New York *Times* seemed to constitute the limit of their information. . . .

It is discouraging to me that most media leaders, and public figures as well, do not give any indication that they are willing to look beyond the clichés taken from the popular media. . . .

DOUGLAS H. SCHEWE

Madison, Wisconsin

SUZANNE GARMENT writes:

"Why not discuss," asks Herb Greer in his letter, "whether journalistic practice is not restricted by the Fourth Amendment . . .?" "The Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process," he adds, "has also repeatedly been violated by journalists." There is no avoiding the word: this train of thought is silly. These amendments were not intended to apply to journalists, have never been interpreted to apply to them except in marginal ways, and will never be the means of working the transformation Mr. Greer thinks necessary.

The U.S. Constitution is sometimes inconvenient that way. Neither has American libel law proved to be a very effective instrument of retribution against the broad-ranging journalistic sins Mr. Greer enumerates.

We who would reform the press are therefore stuck with using means less compelling than the force of law. The journalists of Mr. Greer's letter, though, are so vicious that anything less than coercion could not possibly prompt any change in them at all. Mr. Greer has told us there are hellish monsters out there and sent us off to fight them with broken swords.

In fact, though, the monsters are not precisely as Mr. Greer draws them. He writes of journalists who are always walking around snarling that they and "*no one else*" shall determine the rules of the press game. Impressions differ, of course, but the journalists I've met —including me—are, for better or for worse, more dependent creatures than that. They are in vital and constant need of new ideas, fresh stories, cooperative sources.

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THE STORY BEHIND RECENT HEADLINES

What do the following major front-page news events of the past year have in common?

- The loss of 31 lives aboard the U.S.S. Stark, attacked accidentally by an Iraqi warplane.
- The U.S. reflagging and escorting of Kuwaiti ships in the Persian Gulf.
- The staggering U.S. trade deficit, which reached its highest point in history this year.

The answer is oil. All of these events resulted in large part from our heavy dependence on foreign oil. Yet despite all the attention to these symptoms, we are not attacking the disease of foreign oil dependence itself. Instead we're becoming more hooked on it.

The Problem With Oil

The major oil problem is that most of the world's supply belongs to other countries.

- Almost two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves lie under the nations of the Persian Gulf.
- The U.S. controls only about 4.6 percent of the world's oil reserves, but we still use more than 25 percent of the world's annual production.
- From 1976 to 1986, we paid $640 billion for foreign oil, or about one-fourth the cost of all our imports.
- Last year the U.S. imported 6 million barrels of oil per day, an increase of more than 1 million barrels per day over 1985.

The Electric Solution

The solution to our growing oil addiction is the same as it was after the 1973/74 Arab oil embargo – to use energy more efficiently and to turn to more electricity generated by our own abundant sources.

Since the embargo, electricity has helped us cut the use of foreign oil and, at the same time, has fueled our economic recovery and growth. Heavy industries, businesses, and even homes are turning away from burning oil to increased reliance on electric systems.

Society is in a transition from an age dominated by oil to an age of electricity. In 1986 we used almost 40 percent more electricity than we did in 1973. This past summer, utilities across the country reported record electric usage they had not expected for years to come. Those new supplies of electricity have come almost entirely from coal and nuclear energy.

The Role of Nuclear Energy

Nuclear energy is now the second largest source of our electricity after coal. In just 30 years, more than 100 nuclear power plants have been licensed to operate in 32 states. As these plants were switched on, older plants, mainly using oil, were set aside for backup service. In 1986, our nuclear plants produced the electricity equivalent of 2 million barrels of oil a day.

With 13 plants still being built, nuclear energy will be the nation's fastest growing source of electricity for the rest of this decade. And public attitude research indicates the American public is counting on nuclear energy – 80 percent believe nuclear energy will be important in meeting our electricity needs in the years ahead, and 77 percent believe our need for nuclear energy will grow.

But nuclear energy's future growth is in doubt. Financial, political and regulatory uncertainties are preventing utilities from planning any new baseload power plants. At its current growth rate, electricity demand will overtake our reliable supplies in the early 1990s. So we should be planning new electric plants now. But with very few exceptions, we are not.

What will happen? First, we will be forced to switch back on the old oil-fired plants which our coal and nuclear electric generation had pushed into standby service. Then, utilities will order and build the plants that can be put up fastest and cheapest – which means even greater use of oil and more expensive electricity because of high fuel costs.

As a result, we are headed toward greater dependence on foreign oil during the time when international tensions over oil are higher than ever.

Coal and nuclear energy baseload power plants, by themselves, may not solve the tensions in the Mideast and other oil-related problems. But they helped us and the rest of the world overcome the energy crises of the 1970s, and they can help prevent even more economic and also military crises in the 1990s and beyond – crises that will inevitably occur if the world continues competing for Persian Gulf oil instead of turning to the alternatives that are at hand. The result could mean a Persian Gulf stranglehold on U.S. economic strength and on our security.

Harold B. Finger
President and Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Council For Energy Awareness

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They like to be in tune with what is popular. They want to go with the winner. They are fearful of getting caught in factual error that demands correction.

These traits allow journalists to be massively manipulated by people who know how to do the job. These qualities also make the system permeable enough so that there is definitely something to be gained by judiciously yelling bloody murder at appropriate times and in various ways.

"Legal action or bust" is a posture more defeatist than is necessary or useful.

Saul David is absolutely right in saying that journalists have been rougher on Republicans in recent years than on Democrats. But the ethic of journalistic investigation seems to have slipped its party-partisan moorings lately, as ex-presidental candidate Joseph Biden and repentant presidential candidate Michael Dukakis will testify.

Mr. David is also quite right to say that some newspapers have embraced the new rules more readily than others have. But there has been a change in many places. My guess is that twenty years ago a paper like the Washington *Post* would have hesitated to run reports even on the womanizing of a presidential candidate still in the race.

Douglas H. Schewe emphasizes what needs emphasizing: journalism is often a very sad thing these days, but Congressmen who seem to get all their information from newsmagazines are worse.

Goals & Quotas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Nuechterlein's "A Farewell to Civil Rights" [August] is an excellent article. I have only one negative comment. In describing how affirmative action was an innocent enough concept that went awry, Mr. Nuechterlein says:

> No one could reasonably object to efforts to seek out qualified members of minority groups for educational or occupational advancement, and it was not wrong to offer special training or remedial opportunities to disadvantaged minorities to improve their levels of qualification.

I would have less of a problem with this statement if "minority" referred to economically disadvantaged persons regardless of race, nationality, or surname. But I believe that any policy which in seeking, promoting, training, etc. gives preference to one racial minority over others is an immoral policy which is inconsistent with Mr. Nuechterlein's subsequent statement:

> [The] belief that advancement in our society should come according to individual effort and skill without regard to attributes of ancestry, class, or religion stands at the very heart of the American idea. . . .

During its early years, the affirmative-action program was described as having "goals" regarding minority hiring and promotion, but not "quotas," which were acknowledged to be discriminatory. Goals, the logic went, were numerical objectives that did not have to be met; quotas did. In the real world, however, this distinction could only be theoretical, and, in fact, the word goal was soon dropped and replaced by the term quota.

Another element of the philosophy of affirmative action, and one that is fundamental to it, is the idea that as long as the basic job requirements are met, the choice should go to a member of a minority. Whatever happened to the concept of finding the best person for the job, not just the one meeting the minimal standards? Surely we should attempt to hire and promote the very best people we can find, regardless of race or nationality. . . .

L. M. SLAVIN
Rockaway, New Jersey

JAMES NUECHTERLEIN writes:

I agree entirely with L. M. Slavin's argument that access to education or occupation should be based on standards of competence that disregard matters of race or ethnicity. I also agree that the differentiation between goals and quotas in such matters has, in practice, often amounted to a distinction without a difference. But I see nothing wrong if, for example, a city police or fire department, without lowering its standards of acceptance, makes particular efforts to recruit in minority neighborhoods, or if a university offers remedial pre-matriculation programs especially directed at prospective minority students who are otherwise qualified for entrance but who have been victims of inferior high-school education. In other words, while racial discrimination or exclusion is always wrong, a racial awareness that takes account of the special problems or disabilities of certain minority groups is not necessarily so.

New Zealand

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Roger Sandall's critique of New Zealand, "Beyond California" [June], quickly degenerates from a witty send-up in the first few paragraphs to an appallingly inaccurate portrayal of the country and its foreign policy. Mr. Sandall is both gratuitously offensive, as when he compares New Zealand to the "civilized world," and extremely malicious when he discusses the government's political motives and local society.

Although the nuclear-free zone declared by the Labor government has raised New Zealand's profile in the world, it was not implemented as a power grab or as an anti-American gesture. It is simply not in New Zealand's current interests to be party to a nuclear war. If war breaks out when nuclear vessels are in local waters, the country becomes a target. Since, given the nation's geographic position, there is no way we can benefit from a nuclear defense, that is an unacceptable risk. The Prime Minister has repeatedly stressed that there is nothing anti-American about this, and he has not sought to dismantle the ANZUS alliance.

Indeed, I feel a good case can be made that New Zealand acts more consistently out of self-interest, not "high-mindedness" or "social self-righteousness," than either the U.S. or Australia. Of course, assorted "trendy lefties" can be found here, but they are no more influential or representative than they might be in Iowa. So why does Mr. Sandall quote or cite them exclusively?

Take the identity issue he botches so badly. New Zealand used to be "the Britain of the South." But then the Britain of the North joined the European Economic Community, plunging the local economy into limbo. One effect of this has been to shake up New Zealand's colonial mentality. Given its position in the South Pacific, its search for new markets, and the fact that the Maori heritage provides its only unique cultural symbols, is it strange for New Zealand to experiment with a Pacific orientation? Some people do wax naively lyrical about it, but the strident subjectivity and ma-

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nipulation of the facts evident in Mr. Sandall's diatribe is amazing for an anthropologist from across the Tasman. The discipline is, after all, dedicated to cultural relativism.

In fact, his statements about "bohemianized academics" and "demi-educated dabblers in art, anthropology, education, or social work" are even stranger for an anthropologist to make. Or is anthropology in Sydney (that well-known center of Western civilization) a purer thing?

I am almost struck dumb by Mr. Sandall's attack on the Maori. His allegations about welfare fraud are so scurrilous that I can only note them as racist and outrageous, and hope that a Maori colleague might deign to reply to them properly. . . . The Maori people did, after all, lose roughly 80 percent of their land and population to the colonial encounter by the early decades of the 20th century.

I cannot for the life of me guess what bee has gotten into Mr. Sandall's bonnet, unless he has a terminal case of trans-Tasman jealousy. But surely COMMENTARY has some duty to be objective. "Beyond California" goes far beyond the bounds of responsible criticism. . . .

H.B. LEVINE
Department of Anthropology
Victoria University
Wellington, New Zealand

ROGER SANDALL writes:

So the New Zealand Left is pretty much what you might find in Iowa? Perhaps it is time H.B. Levine revisted the Midwest. I have lived in Mexico and sojourned in India. In neither place have I encounted the level of demented Yankee-phobia which now prevails among middle-class anti-nuclearists in New Zealand.

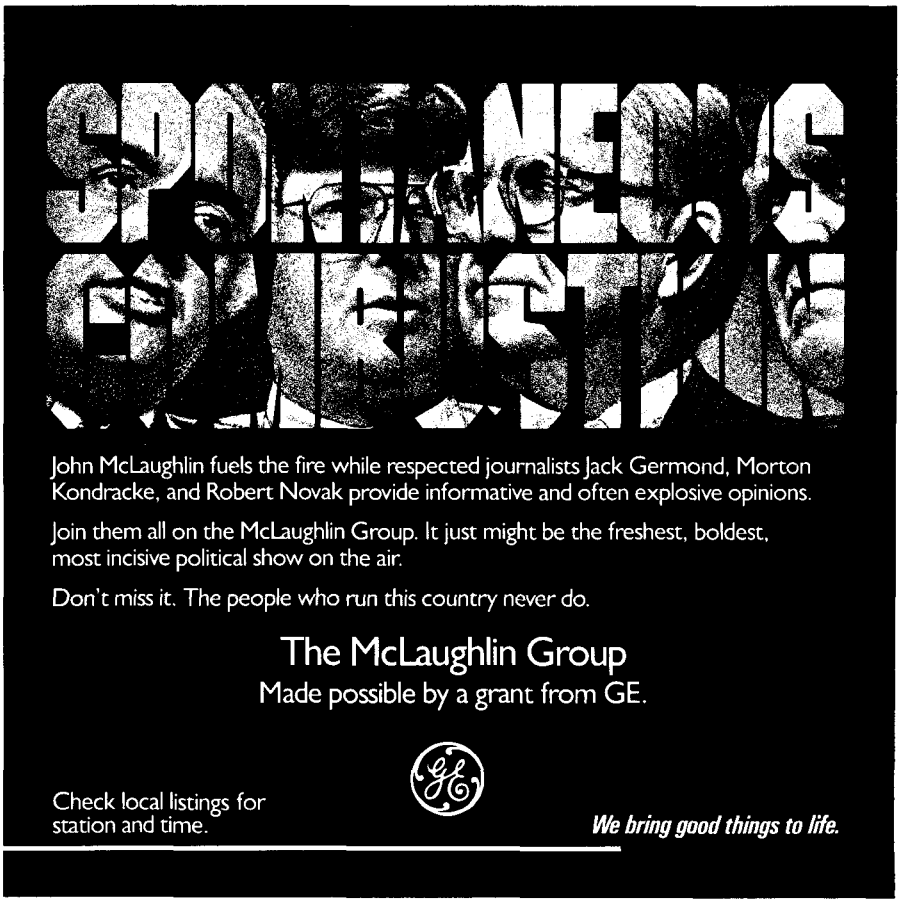
Along with this, grade-school Marxism of a numbing doctrinal simplicity is routinely featured in the middlebrow mass media. The state-owned weekly the *Listener* is the only cultural journal available to the mass of the population, with a stranglehold on its readership since it prints all broadcast-program information (it's the local *TV Guide*). In the January 10, 1987 issue, Ranginui Walker (who seems to have had a weekly column at the time) writes that "The ideology of multiculturalism is resorted to as a mask for Pakeha [white] hegemony. . . . Capitalism alienates people from the land and the product of their labor. . . . The obscenities of capitalism are now being burned into the psyche of Maori and Pakeha alike. . . ." And on and on.

Is this what they are reading in Clear Lake, Iowa? The place must be in worse shape than I thought!

Is anti-nuclearism just practical realism, a spontaneous response to the strategic facts of life? If only that were so. Americans wishing to acquaint themselves with the deeper influences at work in New Zealand and Australia should pick up a copy of *American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific*, published under the auspices of the Nautilus Research Center, Massachusetts, and the Institute for Policy Studies. The book embodies the principal goal of the Australian and New Zealand "peace movements": the irrevocable divorce of these countries from the U.S. A fuller description may be found in "Disinformation for Downunder," by Richard D. Fisher, Jr. of the Heritage Foundation in the August 1987 issue of the Australian monthly *Quadrant*.

Me a racist? Fie, sir, fie! Can't you see that for a Maori motorcycle gang to obtain $45,000 for building a $665 fence testifies to their wit, their enterprise, their panache? And that far more scandalous than the misappropriation of funds by a handful of vagabonds is the whole structure of a welfare system devised by self-deluding white socialist intellectuals—a structure which provides incentives for systematic fraud? In all of this, who are the real racists?

By the way, the last person I know of to be denounced for "scurrilous" observations about Maori life today was the famous Billy T. James. James is New Zealand's only comedian worth the name, and has commanded 44 percent of the TV audience for his shows. He is a funny man; he is also a Maori. In their humorless way, the black-power people threw a bomb at Billy T. James; but, happily, it missed.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Catholics & Patriotism

To the Editor of Commentary:

In her article, "Reclaiming the Catholic Heritage" [September], Anne Roche Muggeridge raises many points worthy of comment. The one I would like to address is her statement: "Indeed, the more orthodox a Catholic is, the more patriotic he is, and the more supportive of traditional American political and moral principles." If what is meant by patriotism is a proper regard for the common good of the country, then indeed all Catholics are duty bound to be patriotic wherever they reside. But if what is meant by patriotic is enthusiasm for the U.S. constitutional regime (or indeed any regime), then it would seem to me salutary for the Catholic "patriot" to be sobered by reflection upon the words of the Psalmist, "Put not your trust in princes," and also upon Jesus's wary indifference to politics.

Furthermore, while *some* orthodox Catholics are patriots in the second sense of the term, so are some non-orthodox Catholics like Michael Novak and George Weigel who, Mrs. Muggeridge informs us, dissent from Catholic moral teaching on birth control. Similarly, some orthodox Catholics, like myself, are indisposed to applaud Fourth-of-July oratory. In my case, it is not due to any antipathy toward democracy; I am neither pro- nor anti-democratic. To my mind, it is quite unreal to consider and judge the United States solely, or primarily, in political terms. Culture is at least as important as politics, and American culture is pandemically consumerist. It is American consumerism more than American democracy which is the country's legacy to the world, the thing that is truly influential, truly seductive. And the justification for the release of the acquisitive passions is not some recent deformation foisted upon a pure people by a left-wing cabal. It goes as far back as James Madison. For a Catholic to be enthusiastic about the American way is, I am convinced, unspeakably unwise.

Stuart Gudowitz
Washington, D.C.

Anne Roche Muggeridge writes:

Catholics should not put their trust in princes, but they should, surely, put their trust in *principles*. American Catholics have consistently supported the founding constitutional consensus of the United States because the "catholic," that is, the universal, self-evident ethical and political principles enunciated therein, "approve themselves," as John Courtney Murray wrote, "to the Catholic intelligence and conscience. Where this kind of language is talked, the Catholic joins the conversation with complete ease. It is his language. The ideas expressed are native to his universe of discourse."

Until very recently, patriotism for the American Catholic has meant support both for the principles underlying the American experiment in democracy and for the civil and political institutions which incarnated those principles. In our time, the breakdown of the original moral and political consensus has caused many Catholics to abandon the "American Proposition" for hostile, extra-political activism. Nevertheless, very many orthodox (morally conservative) Catholics continue to support the Proposition, and to work through the political system to restore it, because they believe that even in its weakened state it expresses the principles of the natural moral law better than any existing political alternative does. That is why such Catholics massively switched political allegiance for the first time in their American experience during the 1972 presidential campaign. They disliked Nixon and the traditionally anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Republican party, but they disliked even more George McGovern's moral and social program. It never occurred to them not to vote at all. Even in the face of what they consider the greatest moral evil America has committed, the legalization of abortion, they remain true to their Catholic and American principles, choosing the democratic way of persuasion over that of violence. Likewise, it is their perception that the "peace movement" is in large part a coalition of moral and political revolutionaries that keeps them out of it, not their susceptibility to "Fourth-of-July oratory."

Orthodox Catholics do not absolutize the American experiment in religious freedom and pluralism in a non-confessional state. They are aware, as were Pope Leo XIII, Tocqueville, and Cardinal Newman, as am I, of the relationship of political democracy to liberalism in religion. Yet American Catholic history appears to have proven that there is no *necessary* incompatibility between being Catholic and being American.

Stuart Gudowitz's charge that American democracy invented and exports "consumerism" (by which he means, I assume, the desire to own lots of things) seems to me an example of reverse chauvinism. It is vainglorious to credit the United States in general, or James Madison in particular, with the invention of greed. Greed is indeed not a "recent deformation"; it is as old as Genesis, a deformity of every human heart by original sin. "The love of money is the root of all evil." Americans are not unique in needing to fight the temptation to covetousness.

The Imperial Congress

To the Editor of Commentary:

George Szamuely, in his "The Imperial Congress" [September], seeks an explanation for the onslaught on the presidency, particularly with respect to foreign policy, that took place in the aftermath of . . . Vietnam.

I believe he reaches the heart of the current conflict between the executive and legislative branches when he suggests that legislative prohibitions (Boland, Cooper-Church, and Clark amendments, etc.) were not merely meant to fetter the President's discretionary powers, they were actually meant to lead to different policy outcomes from those which the President, as "the constitutional representative of the nation," had intended. In short, there is a profound ideological conflict over U.S. foreign policy between a McGovern-dominated Congress and a conservative executive which is irreconcilable. Our constitutional system worked so long as there was a bipartisan foreign policy. This is no longer possible in the foreseeable future. The constitutional system has simply broken down under the weight of 20th-century ideological conflict that was not foreseen (and could not have been foreseen) by the Founding Fathers when they provided for a separation of powers. They assumed that "factional conflict" would not extend to foreign policy. The Framers believed that political conflict occurs most commonly and durably over economic interests. But ideological passion is not necessarily tied to economic interests.

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The authors of the Constitution preferred a strong independent executive who could act swiftly, conduct secret diplomacy, and be free of volatile mass opinion. Until the close of the Vietnam war there was a sufficient consensus on the objectives of U.S. foreign policy to meet the exigencies of national security, despite the constitutional separation of powers. Now, as Jeane Kirkpatrick points out:

> In foreign affairs particularly, Congress has stretched the powers of the purse and of oversight beyond recognition or reason—claiming for itself a veto power over many details of implementation, devising action-forcing mechanisms that limit presidential authority. The War Powers Resolution adopted in 1973 (whose constraints no President has accepted) is the most sweeping example of such legislation.

Mr. Szamuely argues that the revisionist version of American history (i.e., that Presidents have arrogated to themselves illegitimate powers through illegal overseas commitments) offers a thinly disguised "ideological cover" for the attempts of Congress to reclaim powers it never possessed. Actually, the "cover" is an attempt to rationalize the ideology. The "cover" is grounded in a spurious interpretation of the Constitution. What is at stake is a battle over two entirely different visions of U.S. foreign policy.

Mr. Szamuely never comes to grips with the ideology which motivates the McGovern-type Democrats who control Congress. Fundamentally, the ideology rests upon the implicit assumption that revolution is the only way to achieve economic and social justice in Central America (and elsewhere in the Third World). . . . This is the indispensable background to Mr. Szamuely's article, which is excellent as far as it goes.

DAVID S. LICHTENSTEIN
Rockville, Maryland

The Prophetic Tradition

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Jerold S. Auerbach's "Liberalism & the Hebrew Prophets" [August] makes me wonder whether he and I use the same Hebrew Bible. I question whether he uses the same unexpurgated texts of the Prophets because he does not quote even one of the scores of pronouncements of the Prophets declaring that *mishpat*, biblical sacred law, is as inseparable from social justice as it is from not serving strange gods. Whether the Prophets were antinomian in the sense of negating and perhaps opposing the sacrificial temple service is a moot question. But there is no doubt that they "heard" God tell biblical Israel:

> I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,
> And the knowledge of God rather
> than burnt-offerings. [Hosea 6:6]

In the same manner Isaiah has God tell biblical Israel that the fast He chooses is

> To loosen the fetters of wickedness
> And to let the oppressed go free,
> And that you break every yoke.
> Is it not to give your bread
> to the hungry
> And that you bring the poor that
> are cast out to your house?
> When you see the naked that you
> cover him
> And that you hide not yourself from
> your own flesh? [Isaiah 58:6-7]

And Micah asks:

> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
> With ten thousands of rivers
> of oil? . . .
>
> It has been told you, O man, what
> is good
> And what the Lord requires of you:
> Only to do justly [*la'asot mishpat*]
> and to love
> mercy, and to walk humbly with
> your god. [Micah 6:6-7]

Mishpat (law) is all-important. Since biblical Israel was a people of law, extensive social legislation figured prominently in biblical law. The poor did not have to rely on the "charity" or "good will" of those with means, but on *mishpat*.

The poor, and especially widows and orphans, were *entitled* to support. Biblical *mishpat* anticipated, in terms of an agricultural society, "social welfare," but without the humiliation and stigma that have come to be attached to it. Lacking land and property, the poor were given a share in the harvest by

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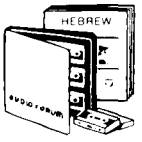

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mishpat. They were entitled to what grew at the corners of the field, and the owners were forbidden to glean their fields and vineyards:

> And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of the field, neither shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave it for the poor, and for the stranger. [Leviticus 19:9-10]

There were no signs reading "no trespassing" for the hungry. They were permitted to eat their fill of grapes and ripe corn, but not to carry any of it away (Deuteronomy 23: 25-26).

Shemittah—letting the fields and vineyards lie fallow every seven years—also provided support for the poor, for whatever grew spontaneously in the seventh year belonged to the poor as of right (Exodus 23:11).

Even more remarkable was the allotment of the tithe of every third year, not to the sacrificial cult but to the needy:

> At the end of every three years, in that very same year, you shall bring forth all the tithe of your increase and shall put it within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow who are within your gate shall come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do. [Deuteronomy 14:28-29]

I shall not take issue with Mr. Auerbach's sallies against "liberal values," which are unfounded and unsupported by texts (the Bible, the Talmud, the commentaries and codes). Contrary to what Mr. Auerbach asserts, liberal values definitely are authentic Jewish values and they are documented *especially* by the words of the Hebrew Prophets. . . .

It is not for nothing that all liberation movements, including contemporary liberation theology, turn to the Hebrew Bible and the Prophets for authentication.

Liberalism is indeed "an expression of biblical tradition," but, and here I agree with Mr. Auerbach, the emphasis on Jewish social liberalism, which uses the same word *tzedakah* for "justice" and "charity," does not rule out fealty to Jewish ritual law.

Contemporary Reform Judaism . . . is very far removed from the days of a century ago. Mr. Auerbach should read the Reform responsa on Halakhah by Rabbis Solomon B. Freehof and Walter Jacob, and Michael Walzer's book *Exodus and Revolution*, so that (and here I quote him) he might "recover the full impact of the prophetic message," which he wrongly claims to be what it is not, namely, a prop for conservatism.

TRUDE WEISS-ROSMARIN
Editor, *Jewish Spectator*
Santa Monica, California

JEROLD S. AUERBACH writes:

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin's letter substantiates the conclusion of my article: the message of the Hebrew Prophets is misunderstood by those who are determined to squeeze it into the political agenda of their favorite current liberation movement. Hebrew prophecy affirmed the covenant between God and Israel and demanded obedience to divine command. Fidelity to the sacred law—not to liberalism or conservatism—still defines the prophetic mission.

J.D. Salinger

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

One can understand the sickness of American culture by reading Terry Teachout's "Salinger Then and Now" [September]. The article, which begins with a discussion of Salinger's lawsuit against Random House and Ian Hamilton (for unfair use of Salinger's correspondence in Hamilton's biography *J.D. Salinger: A Writing Life*), embodies what I would call a reflexive paradox. Given Salinger's legitimate appeal for eremitism, any article on his work which discusses the latest incidents is a personal insult. If what Salinger wants is to be erased from the American memory, there is no place for Mr. Teachout's article. But can a country so enchanted with immortality through public exposure accept such a humble premise? . . .

The Salinger-Random House paradox can, nevertheless, be phrased in more philosophical terms: are our actions and our work truly ours once they are in the public domain?

ZURI BALKOFF
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Terry Teachout is ordinarily a decent critic, as the species goes. Hence I was particularly appalled by his article trashing J.D. Salinger. The dedication of *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters* to the "amateur reader," which Mr. Teachout quotes, becomes particularly poignant after his outrageous last paragraph. For an amateur is one who pursues an activity out of love rather than for self-advancement. It is not the opposite of sophisticated, but of professional . . . and Salinger's misgivings about professional readers are justified by Mr. Teachout's handling of his work.

Why do I call Mr. Teachout's last paragraph outrageous? Because his major thrust in discussing *The Catcher in the Rye* is that it is an eerily faithful rendition of a nearly universal condition. Yet in his last paragraph he protests having "Holden Caulfield's vision of the world forced into the minds of . . . children." He cannot have it both ways. But then, ambiguous and contradictory assertions frequently result from a failure to grasp adequately that about which one writes.

Mr. Teachout seems to think that the book's culminating nervous breakdown is tacked on as a cop-out, when, in fact, the entire book is about the process of a nervous breakdown, from which Holden is recovering when he tells his story, and which he recognizes to have been undesirable. In fact, *The Catcher in the Rye* . . . presents a common enough, and harmless enough, adolescent condition in pathological hypertrophy. What is that condition? Not misanthropy, as Mr. Teachout thinks, but an almost unbearable compassion. The book records an especially acute version, not of disillusionment with the world, but of the frantic desire to put things right, to help people, to catch people when they fall (hence the title). The reason that Holden has a nervous breakdown is that it is difficult for him to confront his own impotence. Recovering from the breakdown means learning the secret, and sorrow, of maturity: accepting the world as it is, and one's limited power to affect it.

Similarly, Mr. Teachout does not even know what "Seymour: An Introduction" is about. He describes it as "a love song J.D. Salinger croons to Buddy Glass," and dismisses it as narcissistic. One may

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as well dismiss *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as narcissistic. "Seymour: An Introduction" is a modernist literary experiment dealing with an essential, and rather difficult, theme. Buddy loves Seymour intensely, and knows him intimately, and ardently desires to communicate something vital about him. And precisely because of the intensity of his concern, he can say almost nothing about Seymour, so great is his anxiety to do it right. This merely particularizes the dilemma of every truly serious writer, that it is horribly daunting to address directly that which concerns one most deeply, precisely because of the anxiety to convey faithfully one's perceptions. Indeed, in a sense the story is a defense of modernism as a literary practice, since only such devotion and attendant anxiety can justify all of the convolutions of form to which that tradition has had recourse. But it would be a mistake to deem the story merely "about writing." Rather, Buddy's dilemma is a human dilemma, acutely represented, similar to Holden's. To love truly brings not only joy but trepidation and self-consciousness, a sense of one's limitations and mortality, and a sometimes exhausting struggle nevertheless to speak and act as best one can. Anyone who has been married (with love), or had children, say, faces this truth periodically.

Since Mr. Teachout does not know what Salinger's themes are (one may almost say, what his theme *is*), he has little relevant to say about him or his work. How wrong-headed is his lambasting of Salinger as a "hip guru," this author who has despaired of *all* critics, including the fatuously appreciative, and hidden himself from the world. Salinger's is not a "Zen-flavored gospel of youthful authenticity and neurotic rebellion." Indeed, in his most important story, "Zooey," he drives the point home in Zooey's disgust with, and rescue of, his sister Franny from neurasthenic religiosity. . . . Zooey preaches to Franny, who is nauseated by inauthenticity ("ego, ego, ego") in herself and others and on the road to a nervous breakdown, the doctrine of devotion to her craft (acting) and to her audience. . . . Surely that is advice of which Mr. Teachout would approve, if he were only perceptive enough to get it.

In closing, permit me to ask what was the point of publishing such an article? As Mr. Teachout says of *The Catcher in the Rye*, "The book will no doubt remain popular so long as there are teenagers around to read it." Hence it would seem futile to publish a superficial, tendentious essay such as his: who, after all, cares? . . .

MICHAEL DAVID BLUME
Annapolis, Maryland

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Zuri Balkoff's point is an interesting one. J.D. Salinger is entitled to his privacy. The case of *J.D. Salinger* v. *Random House Inc. and Ian Hamilton*, however, was not about Salinger's privacy but about whether or not Ian Hamilton infringed on Salinger's copyright by publishing portions of his correspondence. This is a matter of public policy, and to discuss it is by no means a "personal insult" to Salinger. In any case, if what J.D. Salinger really wants is to be "erased from the American memory" he should start by removing his books from print.

As for Michael David Blume, I see no reason to comment on a letter which speaks quite eloquently for itself—and, I suspect, for many of J.D. Salinger's other adult fans as well.

Letter to the New Republic

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

For some reason, Judge Richard A. Posner saw fit to compose an article (not a book review) devoted exclusively to an attack on my essay, "Government by Lawyers & Judges," published in the June 1987 issue of COMMENTARY. For some reason, the *New Republic* saw fit to publish Judge Posner's article in its issue of September 28, 1987. For some reason, and probably the same reason, the editors of that journal refused to publish the following response, which I sent to them immediately:

September 14, 1987

The New Republic
1220 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

To the editors:

With respect to Richard A. Posner's article in your issue of September 28:

I don't think Judge Posner was being fair when he ridiculed my distinction between questions involving the rights of individuals and questions "in their nature political"; as he must have known, I was quoting Chief Justice John Marshall.

I don't think he was being fair when he attributed to me the absurd idea that the "domain" of rights is "fixed."

I don't think he was being fair—in fact, I think it was insulting—when he implied that I needed instruction in the business of common law judges.

I don't think he was being fair when he said that my view was that "the Supreme Court should not have invalidated racial segregation in public schools," when what I wrote in the article under review was that "one of the privileges of national citizenship is to attend a nonsegregated public school."

I don't think it is fair to say that a legislature that enacts a law "that did not have [his] consent" is, by virtue of that fact, a legislature that acts without the consent of the governed.

And I *do* think, by way of concluding, that any litigant who wants to be fairly judged should do whatever is necessary to avoid being judged by Judge Richard A. Posner.

WALTER BERNS
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

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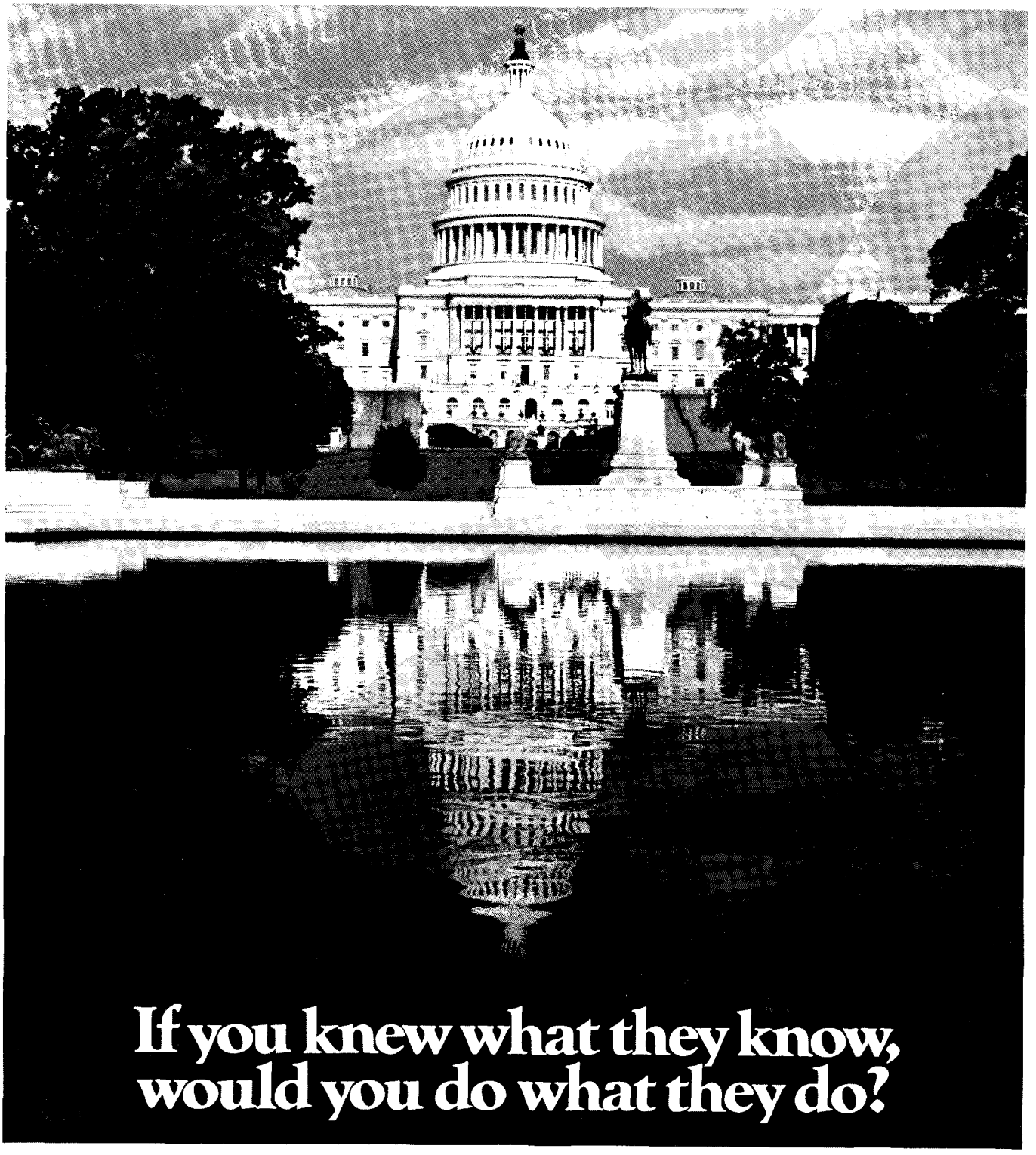

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Remembering Vietnam

H. J. Kaplan

IN SAIGON between 1965 and 1966, while I was serving as counselor to the American embassy, I lived for about fourteen months in a street called Phan Dinh Phung, a name that had unaccountably slipped my mind, until I came across it again in *The Palace File,* by Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold S. Schecter,* a recently published history of the last years of the war. I had tried now and then, for one reason or another, to recall my Saigon address, but desultorily; not to the point, say, of going to a library and finding a map of the city. Life is short, there is always too much to do. And here it was, emitting a faint mnemonic pulse, on the very first page of a book I had opened unwillingly—because who wants to go back to all that?—and finally read with bated breath, passionately, as if I did not know how it was going to come out.

Of course I knew, in a general way, how it was going to come out, although the concluding chapters of *The Palace File* provide no end of details I had failed to register at the time, or registered and then forgot: about how South Vietnam's gold reserves fell into Hanoi's hands; the heroic last stand of the ARVN (the Republic of Vietnam's ground troops) at Xuan Loc; the hopeless attempts to persuade the U.S. Congress to authorize emergency aid, if only to slow down the pace of events and extricate the most endangered people, the most valuable equipment; the beginning of the South Vietnamese exodus.

Hung and Schecter deal briefly and grimly with these incidents, their concern being not so much to wring our hearts as to clinch the argument they have been making, to the effect that in order to get the South Vietnamese to agree to the Paris Peace Accords of 1973, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon made secret promises (later repeated by Gerald Ford) to President Nguyen Van Thieu that were never kept. This is the central thesis of *The Palace File,* which is based on a series of hitherto secret communications between the American President and Thieu:

> Both President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger promised Thieu that the Seventh Air Force at Nakorn Phanom would be used to bomb North Vietnamese targets if the Paris Accords were violated. [Seventh Air Force chief] General Vogt's oral history clearly demonstrates that his forces were not only a deterrent, but he expected to mount a full-scale response to North Vietnamese violations. Certainly, the letters from President Nixon to President Thieu were commitments that had not been made public or shared privately with the Congress. . . . [F]or the South Vietnamese, however, they were, in fact, part of the understanding.

On April 23, 1975, while the decimated ARVN 43rd regiment was firing its last munitions east of Xuan Loc, holding its ground and inflicting enormous losses on a vastly superior enemy force, Gerald Ford (who had by then succeeded Nixon as President) raised the white flag. In a speech at Tulane University in New Orleans, he said: "America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned." The Vietnamese who heard these words—Hung, for example, who was in Washington, desperately lobbying Congress—were devastated, of course, but not surprised. Nor was there any outcry in the country, so far as I can remember, our people having long since—long before the signing of the "peace" agreement in January 1973—turned its back on Vietnam.

A week later, to be sure, Hanoi's tanks breached the gates of Thieu's palace and a new era—the aftermath—began. For several days, like an unshriven ghost, Saigon came back to lead the evening news. Our troops were long gone, but our embassy staff and other civilians had to be extracted. And then all those unbelievable things happened in Southeast Asia: millions murdered by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese "boat people" adrift in the South China Sea, raped and despoiled by pirates. Still, a great power cannot lose itself indefinitely in a situation where "all's to be borne and naught's to be done." So the curtain came down.

Few Americans are aware that in the autumn of

H. J. KAPLAN spent twenty-five years in the Foreign Service, from which he retired in 1969. He has written frequently for the *National Interest* and other magazines, and his previous contributions to COMMENTARY include "With the American Press in Vietnam" (May 1982), "Brother Camus" (February 1983), and "Requiem for the 'Establishment'" (April 1987).

* Harper & Row, 542 pp., $22.95.

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1987—more than twelve years after the war's end—the boat people are still coming out at the rate of 1,200-1,500 a month, an astounding exodus for a people whose sense of self is so deeply rooted in the burial places of their families; or that the ethnic Chinese, including tens of thousands who supported Hanoi in the war, have been expelled from Communist Vietnam or interned; or that Hanoi's army is still bogged down in Cambodia defending a puppet government—*nguy*, the term they once applied so invariably to Saigon; or that the Vietnamese are hungry, even in the bountiful South, hungrier than they have been since the famine that followed the collectivization of the land by the Communists in the North in 1955 and 1956.

The litany goes on, but is anyone listening? Certainly not the "useful idiots" of the Susan Sontag-Mary McCarthy school, that goes without saying—but what about the rest of us? We did the best we could for those people, and the worst; and never learned to distinguish the one from the other. And when the last of our troops left the country in 1973, two years before the fall of Saigon, we had finally reached a consensus: enough was enough.

It still holds, it seems to me, but uneasily. In the fullness of time we built a monument in Washington to mourn our dead. We have had a trickle of novels, memoirs, and films, welling up from many sources, irrepressibly, about mayhem in the jungle and bewildered young men who could not fathom why they were there; and compensatory fantasies of the Rambo type, of course; and even a few attempts, conscientiously financed by foundations and think tanks, to review the historical record on public television. But these, much like the rare works of political and military analysis published in the past few years, have been strangely received, if at all: praised or damned mechanically, as it were, in feeble response to reflexes that have somehow lost their spring. It is as if the Vietnam that once so roiled our body politic, and gave rise to so much reportorial posturing, pop anthropology, and anguished moralism, had been relegated to oblivion, so that we have trouble remembering what it was all about.

And now we have this *Palace File*, a moving account (and from an unaccustomed angle) of one of the most shattering events of our history. It is a *scandalous* book, in the biblical sense of the word, producing serious new evidence and argument to prove that we as a nation not only failed our Vietnamese allies but shamelessly betrayed them. It has been available for more than a year now, but—"woe unto him through whom the scandal comes!"—to date I have seen only one review.

Granted, there must be others, beyond my ken, but I think it safe to assume that *The Palace File* has failed, as they say in the trade, to take off.

* * *

THIS morning's New York *Times* carries the third or fourth of a series of reports on postwar Vietnam. A number of memoirs and studies of former members or supporters of the Vietcong, now for the most part in exile, have been published by David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai. And most importantly, Ellen J. Hammer has brought out her long-awaited—corrosive and devastating—account of the overthrow and murder of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Nhu.*

According to Toai, once a fellow-traveler of the Vietcong and now a research associate at the University of California in Berkeley, there is more ahead; and all this would suggest that the amnesia that followed so hard upon our Vietnamese obsession may be coming to an end. It was never total, and now it remains to be seen whether the larger public, and not just one corner of academia, is ready to go back to "all that." There are always issues more pressing than the past, even the relatively recent past; and this truism is true *a fortiori*—notoriously—for a people as perennially and programmatically unfinished as ours.

Witness the latest episode in the continuing struggle between the White House and Congress over the direction and management of our foreign affairs. When *The Palace File* appeared, the welkin was beginning to ring with revelations and rumors about Reagan's faux pas in Iran and Nicaragua and the possibility, so eagerly embraced by his adversaries, that the law had been violated not only by members of the White House staff but by the President himself, so that for the second time in little more than a decade we seemed to be circling around a constitutional crisis—hardly a propitious moment to be digging up old graves in Southeast Asia.

And yet, as the famous rabbi said, *if not now, when?* If the choice is right the moment is right, by definition. Twelve years have passed since Nguyen Tien Hung left the presidential palace in Saigon with the dossier of top-secret letters from Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford (at least some of them, presumably, drafted by Henry Kissinger) which form the armature of this book. Hung's story needed to be fleshed out, organized, and properly Englished; and Jerrold Schecter, a professional journalist who had covered Southeast Asia for *Time*, published a scholarly study of political Buddhism, and served a term in our own "palace," the office of the National Security Adviser, during the Carter administration, was well prepared for the job. The result of their collaboration is a remarkable piece of work, always moving if not always persuasive: at once the story of the Vietnamese debacle as seen from inside Thieu's office and a graphic account of the paralysis that overcame American power at the moment of truth—a subject not so far from our present preoccupations, after all.

Near or far, we cannot escape it. The paradox

* *A Death in November*, Dutton, 373 pp., $22.50.

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of memory is that it deforms, as it were, truly. We end by becoming a mysterious amalgam of what we remember and what we forget. Hence the significance for me of a Saigon street name, and for our country of the circumstances of Saigon's decline and fall—painful though it be to go back to "all that."

* * *

So now I am struggling to summon up the memory of the people who lived in my house on Phan Dinh Phung—of the Vietnamese especially, because I know at least vaguely what has become of my round-eyed colleagues: Levine and Falkiewicz (who will have forgiven me, I hope, for calling them Jacobowsky and the Colonel) and various others who shared these requisitioned digs for a while and then went back to the West and about their business; whereas the Vietnamese have long been beyond my ken: Huong the grumpy cook, Mai the chambermaid, Li the Chinese driver, and the hard-faced security types who hung around day and night, guns bulging under their chinos and floppy sport shirts, and above all my bohemian friend, Tran Thi Do (or Thérèse, as we called her, using her Catholic name),* who shopped and interpreted for us and once prepared a memorable melon soup when Henry Cabot Lodge and some military brass came to dinner, to the enduring mortification of Huong. She showed up briefly in Washington, a year or so after my return, when I was about to leave for my new post at NATO in Brussels; and I saw her in Paris during the peace talks in 1968 to which I was seconded from Brussels, and tried to persuade her to stay. Her mother had a little money in France, and her brother was a doctor in Cannes. But she was, she said, consumed with homesickness, *le mal du pays*, and insisted on going back and disappeared from view, like so many others.

All these people had visitors, relatives from their villages, sometimes from enemy-infested areas, and Huong—a militant Buddhist who took an equally dim view of the Saigon government and the Vietcong—spent hours talking to them, so that (when there was time and he was willing to distill for me a little of what they said) I sometimes fleetingly had the feeling that I could touch something out there in the mysterious countryside and surmise, if not quite understand, how these people were experiencing the disorder that was roiling the South at that time.

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None of this would seem to have much to do with *The Palace File*, which is the story of the immolation of the republic we helped bring into being after the French left Indochina in 1954—and to which, however imprudently, we pledged "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." No less. The pledge was made and renewed by five successive American administrations, rarely in such resounding rhetoric but perhaps more importantly in deeds, so that when the South Vietnamese began to falter in the early 60's we induced them to fight on by dispatching a half-million of our own troops to their country, building a vast military infrastructure, and organizing a consortium of Asian and Pacific nations to aid them or at least bolster them morally in their struggle.

These early years, however, are only sketchily evoked in *The Palace File*. The authors focus on the period after 1971, the decline and fall, their purpose being not only to make us feel the "pity and terror" of it but also to assert a thesis, namely, that our behavior during the last years—and specifically our failure as a nation to honor Nixon's promises to Thieu—"constitutes the betrayal of an ally, unrivaled in American history."

* * *

The verdict is severe. It is all very well for an old-world country, perfidious Albion, say, to be cynical about its alliances. "England has neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies. It has permanent interests." But this is not for us. We need to think of ourselves as a moral people, perhaps this is the most permanent of our interests. Faced with that terrible sentence from *The Palace File*, we look for attenuating circumstances, and although these are not hard to find they turn out to be the very same arguments that persuaded us to abandon our friends in Vietnam in the first place. The incompetence and fecklessness of our allies made them difficult, if not impossible, to defend; the costs were staggering, incommensurate with any good we might achieve; a growing number of Americans had come to feel, however wrongly, that the war was immoral to begin with, or had lost its moral sanction because of the manner in which it was fought. Etc.

These arguments—and I have cited only a few—were at least arguable. They could be answered but they were mutually reinforcing and finally overwhelming, unless we were willing to go back to the beginning and carry the war to the North, the source of all our troubles. But this was ruled out because it might embroil us with the Chinese. Or so we believed.

A misbegotten affair, and quite hopeless—such was the view of Sargent Shriver, the American ambassador to France in 1968, long before Nixon wrote his letters to Thieu. He suggested that I should leave the Harriman-Vance delegation to the peace talks in Paris (the open ones that were being conducted while Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho were doing the real negotiating in secret) and do something useful, like coming to work for him. The Vietnam game was over, there was nothing for it but to get out.

* Real names have been altered, for obvious reasons.

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Shriver was a good man, amiable and intelligent, but I was dismayed by his readiness to walk away from "all that"—as if the government of a great power could simply repudiate the debts of its predecessors. "So we made a mistake. Let's admit it and cut our losses." But what, then, would happen to the South Vietnamese?

* * *

On Phan Dinh Phung I knew no one except the Japanese ambassador who lived across the street and was good enough to invite me to dinner when I moved in; and people to nod to, of course, including an old man who sold *pho*, a highly seasoned North Vietnamese soup, from a pushcart. A dead ringer for Ho Chi Minh, according to Falkiewicz, but his *pho* was delicious. Thousands of people lived and doubtless still live on our street, one of those great broad southern French avenues of Saigon that run interminably east and west, plane-tree-shaded and elegant until one approaches Le Van Duyet, where a Buddhist monk made a torch of himself in 1963 and hastened the downfall of Ngo Dinh Diem; turning meaner and more populous as you proceed westward, bearing north toward the air base at Tan Son Nhut where Thérèse's mother, if memory serves, owned a house, although she lived on Hai Ba Trung. Or south toward the teeming Chinatown of Cholon—the Big Market. The sense of the place comes back slowly, a patchy disjointed sense, because it takes time and leisure to assimilate a great city; and we had almost none of either.

I say we, meaning the embassy people, but I really cannot speak for the mass of Americans. And mass was increasingly the word. Soon after my arrival in Saigon in 1965, and quite apart from the growing plethora of journalists, the city began swarming with motley assortments of Americans, some of whom seemed to have precious little to do: aspiring writers accredited by countercultural publications; hungry photographers without fixed assignments; delegates of various cockamamie committees; pop anthropologists—they brought a 60's atmosphere to the city center, with their guitars and marijuana and Australian bush hats.

Remembering them now it occurs to me that they were a bizarre little fringe benefit, as it were, of our decision to elbow the South Vietnamese aside and take over their war. But was there ever such a decision? If so, it had been deemed too cosmic for my ears when I went through Washington, en route to Honolulu and Saigon; nor had it ever been announced, out of a "decent respect for the opinion of mankind," to "a candid world." Declarations, formalities, national mobilization—these things were long out of style. We had the Tonkin Gulf resolution, to be sure, and we had dropped some bombs on Northern boat docks in August 1964; and then, if memory serves, on enemy concentrations in the South in February 1965, when the "Rolling Thunder" program (of air attacks on the North) was getting under way. The idea was not so much to do serious damage as to warn Hanoi to cease and desist. I remember sitting with Ambassador Maxwell Taylor in the MAC-V (Military Assistance Command-Vietnam) situation room and watching General Westmoreland describe, pointer in hand, how the marines would land on the beaches at Danang.

The South Vietnamese were not consulted on these operations; they were merely informed, usually *ex post facto*, if at all. They were reeling from a combination of troubles: political chaos in Saigon, increasing infiltration from the North, larger-scale Vietcong attacks. Which brings back an even earlier memory of MAC-V, probably my first, when as a new official at the embassy I was paying a courtesy call and General Richard Stilwell came out of his boss Westmoreland's office, shaking his head sadly, and said to a colleague of mine who was steering me toward the exit: "This is it. These little fellows can't hack it." What "it" was I've forgotten; but the words have stayed with me. If the "little fellows" could not *hack it*, a new term for my lexicon, we Americans of course could.

My point is that this was a pivotal moment. I had been accredited to the Republic of Vietnam, a troubled, weak, misgoverned, and possibly doomed nation. But now Saigon's role, in the scenario we were writing in collaboration with Hanoi, seemed to be fading away. Surely, this was not what we wanted; and yet no one seemed to realize that this was the effect of everything we did.

Sometime during those early days, having occasion to go to the Tan Son Nhut air base, I found the tarmac littered with mounds of personal effects, suitcases, bundles, wall hangings, ceramic elephants, children, dogs, and unhappy wives; and perhaps some happy wives. The families of American personnel were being evacuated. Until then my colleagues had been living the lives of embassy people everywhere, more or less: office and field work, social activities, church, schools, sports—the whole peacetime bit, including ordinary human contact with local people. In the Foreign Service this sort of thing is encouraged, as everyone knows, except in notoriously hostile countries. The Saigonese I first met were anything but hostile, however critical or skeptical they might be about us. Coming from my last post in chilly Geneva, I found them voluble and easy enough to talk to, if not always open and easy to understand. The cultural gap was huge, obviously, if you had never served in Asia; but why should that daunt a proper Foreign-Service type? I engaged a lovely young person who appeared every morning in a pale green *ao dai*, to teach me some Vietnamese.

Then suddenly, by March or April, all that was gone, or going. The Vietnamese tended, except in their roles as "counterparts" or office help, mysteriously to disappear. More precisely, as I labor to recall that time, it was we who became preoccupied and lost sight of them. No sooner had the

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marines landed at Danang and army and air-force units begun to settle in all over the country than we became almost exclusively absorbed with one another; and with the media, which proliferated so that our daily briefings began to resemble mass meetings. I made a great fuss about getting the ARVN to hold daily briefings, but it was hopeless; they were hardly attended and it was rare that any news came out of them.

Certain embassy officers, to be sure, kept trying to maintain some semblance of a normal diplomatic atmosphere. They organized and attended receptions, cocktails, dinners, just as they might have done in Tokyo, London, or Rome; they went to the racetrack on Sundays or picnicked on the Saigon River with diplomatic acquaintances and friends or played tennis or swam at the Cercle Sportif, a dilapidated relic of the French colonial days. Not to speak of the liaisons that sprung up, still, with the elegant Vietnamese women one encountered in such places. But not for long. It soon became impossible for such women to dine out with Americans, for fear of being taken for bar girls. The military flood was rising implacably to engulf the official establishment, so that by the end of the summer of 1965 the correspondents, Americans as well as foreign, sometimes had to be reminded that I was still a civilian, and that my boss was not General Westmoreland but Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

Not that it made much practical difference. Barry Zorthian, the Information Chief, was also a civilian; and yet he had officers, including at least one general, on his staff, and military briefings were held under his auspices.

Of course, the Southerners did not actually disappear, nor did we really cease to see them. During the so-called "American war"—from 1965 to 1970—they suffered far more casualties than we did. But politically, and in the world's eyes, the struggle was now between us and Hanoi.

* * *

NGUYEN TIEN HUNG, the co-author of *The Palace File*, was a professor of economics who lived in Washington, D.C., with his American wife and children. That he happened to stop at his mother's house on Phan Dinh Phung when he briefly returned to Saigon in the autumn of 1971 is of no particular consequence, except to me. We were there at different times, but some ghostly trace of us (according to a quite plausible Vietnamese superstition) must continue to hover over the place; so now I can think of him as a sort of neighbor.

The American role in the war was winding down in 1971 and Hung, with the candor of an economist, believed that if the South offered to supply the North with rice and other commodities, Hanoi might be induced to leave the republic in peace; and he hoped during his visit to interest Thieu in this idea. Thieu, on the other hand, was eager to hear Hung's views on the mood of the United States, on which his fate depended, just as the North's implacable ambition depended on the supplies it received from the Soviet Union. But the important thing about this meeting was simply that the two men hit it off, and Hung—although initially suspect as a member of a Diemist family—was invited back.

On his next trip, however, in the spring of 1972, he had to wait for some days before he could see Thieu, who was very busy at the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS). The Communists, on the night of Hung's arrival, had launched their Easter offensive, sending tanks and motorized artillery for the first time massively across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the demarcation line between North and South established by the Geneva conference of 1954. The South Vietnamese should have been prepared for this but weren't; they were accustomed to operating with the help of Westmoreland's computerized command center, MAC-V, and the JGS was ill-equipped to maneuver and supply their regional and regular forces with the requisite speed. Still, they were learning. Surprised and badly mauled at first, they rallied and drove Hanoi's troops from Quangtri, taking heavy casualties but destroying about half the invading force.

The other half, however, did not withdraw across the DMZ. Despite the vigorous pounding it took from General Truong's artillery and from American aircraft based in Thailand, it remained in the South, rebuilding and augmenting its strength with fresh troops and new Soviet equipment—and signaling ominously that Hanoi was shifting into the conventional mode. The Vietcong had been decimated during the Tet offensive, early in 1968, and all but eliminated as a fighting force thereafter: the peasants and city dwellers of the South had been invited to the General Uprising (foreseen in the Communist scenario as the climactic phase of the class struggle) and failed to come. So the future, Hanoi was saying, belonged to the regular army, and the question of what to do about the North Vietnamese military presence in the South had become—for Saigon, especially—the key issue in the secret negotiations that Henry Kissinger was conducting with Hanoi's Le Duc Tho in Paris—negotiations about which Thieu suspected that he was being told only what Kissinger wanted him to know.

This was a crucial moment. Even in the Vietnamese political context, where prevarication was normal and mistrust a matter of elementary prudence, Nguyen Van Thieu impressed his associates as an inordinately suspicious man—the proverbial paranoiac with ample grounds for his paranoia. In 1963, as a young colonel in command of the Fifth Infantry Division, he had played a curiously ambivalent role in the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem. The affair had left him with a sense of transgression that he never managed to shake off, nor did he ever forgive the officers responsible for

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murdering Diem and his brother and thus, in his view, turning a political act into a common crime. The cruelest letter in *The Palace File*, therefore, and surely the most shocking, is the one in which Nixon, exasperated by Thieu's refusal to approve a penultimate draft of the Paris Accords, reminds him of the fate that befell Diem in 1963 and suggests that something of the sort might happen again. But it will take a year of secret diplomacy to bring matters to such a point.

Meanwhile I can imagine Thieu in 1972 plying Hung with questions. What are the Americans up to? Why does Nixon allow that man to talk to the Communists behind my back? Le Duc Tho, who treated Kissinger with a mixture of arrogance and condescension, had broken off the talks in March, as if to say: time out, chum, while you get a load of *this*; and then produced an offensive which had cost Hanoi 75,000 casualties and mountains of materiel but might well, if the North Vietnamese troops were permitted to remain in the South, win them the war.

To be sure, Thieu received a heartwarming letter from Nixon at this juncture—the sixth item in the Palace File—announcing the mining of Haiphong harbor, which had berthed some 350 Soviet ships during the preceding year, according to the CIA. This would certainly bring Le Duc Tho back to Paris again, even if he had not intended to come back in any case—but to what end? With what agenda? And why, if not to legitimize the present situation, should the Americans talk to him before he withdrew his troops to the North?

It is difficult, knowing what we now know, not to get ahead of this story. Hung, of course, could not possibly be expected to answer Thieu's questions. Nor could anyone else. This was early 1972, remember, and Nixon was still glowing from his February trip to China and looking forward to visiting Moscow in May. Watergate was an apartment complex on the Potomac, nothing more. In his first letter to Thieu, written on the eve of his departure for Peking, Nixon had graciously defined the position he would take if the subject of Vietnam came up: "I want to assure you that I will set forth clearly and forcefully the position of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam that the war in Vietnam must be ended through direct negotiations with Hanoi or, failing that, by the growing ability of the Republic of Vietnam to defend itself against Hanoi's aggression." And a few paragraphs later: "With respect to my visit to Moscow in May, I wish to make it clear that the United States has no intention of dealing over the heads of its friends and allies in any manner where their security interests might be involved." But wasn't this precisely what Nixon had already sent Kissinger to Paris to do?

Alas, the fate of the Smaller Kingdom was at stake, and the lords of the Larger Kingdom seemed increasingly distant and distracted. In raising such questions, as he did repeatedly throughout that fateful year, Thieu was doing what came naturally. He was worrying out loud. Small wonder that he kept Nixon's letters in his desk drawer and reread them, according to Hung, again and again.

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WITHAL, there were omens and signs in these letters that Thieu could not read at all, even with the help of Hung and other American-educated members of his staff. On April 6, 1972, Nixon had written to assure him that the United States viewed Hanoi's Easter offensive as "a flagrant and outrageous violation of both the Geneva Accords of 1954 and the 1968 understandings" (i.e., the bombing halt negotiated by the Harriman-Vance mission in Paris) and to assure him that "the United States . . . will not hesitate to take whatever added military steps are necessary . . . ." So far so good—especially the delphic reference to added steps. They could only be what Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams had already hinted at: aeronaval action against the North.

For Thieu this was a consummation devoutly to be wished. His feeling was that the war was now entering a new and decisive phase. The South was increasingly prosperous and secure, although the departure of more than a half-million Americans would cause some painful economic problems for a time. The Vietcong had largely disappeared, except as a façade for Northern troops. The PAVN, Hanoi's regular army, was now removing the camouflage, as it were, unfurling its banners and preparing to move massively and in its own name. Thieu's instinct as a military man was to seek to spoil these preparations. But how? Bombing Northern railheads and roads had never seriously impeded infiltration, even when the PAVN was losing 50 percent of its men on the way down through the jungle. Something had to be done to interdict the massive Soviet input at the other end. Indeed, the failure to take such measures had always puzzled the South Vietnamese and made them wonder, as they were only too prone to do anyway, about our ultimate intentions. And so, when a letter from Nixon arrived on May 9, announcing that Hanoi's harbors were at last to be mined, it was welcome, to say the least.

But why must there always be a worm in the apple? "The foregoing actions," said Nixon's letter, "will continue until . . . the implementation of an internationally supervised cease-fire throughout Indochina and the release of prisoners of war." And when these conditions were met, "We will stop all acts of force . . . and U.S. forces will be withdrawn from Vietnam within four months."

Now Thieu was reconciled by then to the departure of our ground troops; they had in fact for the most part already left; and he assumed—at that point everyone assumed—that our air and naval power would remain available to intervene in case of need, especially if a cease-fire negotiated

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and sponsored by us was broken. What bothered him in Nixon's letter was that there was no reference, again, to the presence of the North Vietnamese in the South.

This, for Thieu, was not only a military threat, since the PAVN was bigger and better equipped than his army; it was also a political nightmare. The Southerners were being asked to stake their lives on the assumption that an independent South could and would survive. Would not the presence of the PAVN, combined with the departure of the Americans, undermine that assumption—and even suggest that Washington and Hanoi had made a deal at the expense of Saigon?

To nurture such suspicions, which had the effect of a chemical weapon on the nerves of the Southerners, had always been an essential part of the *dau tranh,* the military-political struggle—"the scientific application of Leninist principles," a member of the North Vietnamese delegation once told me in Paris, "under circumstances prevailing in our country." To Nguyen Van Thieu, who had fought with the Vietminh against the French and acquired some grasp of Communist tactics, all this seemed too obvious for Nixon to miss—unless, as Thieu thought Nixon's emissary in Paris was doing, Nixon was also looking for an excuse (after the requisite "decent interval") to cut and run.

The odd thing is that in all the wrangling over treaty drafts which now ensued (and went on and on until Thieu was bludgeoned into accepting the Paris Accords in January 1973) a sort of prudery prevented either side from alluding to the obvious fact that the basic problem was not in the text but on the ground. Hanoi, having sacrificed hundreds of thousands of its young men and endured daily bombing for eight long years, was simply not going to remove its troops and give up its designs on the South unless it was forced to do so; and this would require energetic and costly moves by the ARVN and continued American air and naval support, including a sustained effort to interdict the PAVN's lines of supply.

What mattered, then, was the relationship of forces, and what Thieu failed or refused to understand was that the American President, even after his overwhelming electoral triumph of November 1972, was no longer in a position to rethink and refight, even on a much reduced level, a war which the American people expected him to end. The repatriation of our troops had lessened political pressures, to be sure, but it had also in a curious way increased the public's impatience with the situation, its desire to have done with it at last. Initiatives like the Cambodian incursion, or the mining of Haiphong harbor, could be taken only within a perspective of withdrawal; and Nixon would pay a heavy political price for each.

This, of course, was the consequence of the strategies of "flexible response" and "limited war" inherited by Nixon from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations—strategies based on premises (e.g., the political situation in China, the patience of the American people, the Soviet interest in détente) that had proved to be utterly false; and it meant that already in 1972, before Watergate, when Nixon was approaching the apogee of his power, actions that demonstrably "worked" in Southeast Asia were debilitating failures in Washington, since they strengthened the hand of the McGoverns, the Kennedys, and the Abzugs, for whom the victory of Hanoi was inevitable and, in any event, a lesser evil than continued support of the South Vietnamese regime.

* * *

For all the hours that Thieu spent poring over Nixon's letter of May 9, one phrase seems to have escaped his notice, or to have been dismissed as inconsequential: the one about prisoners of war. Of course peace would mean an exchange of prisoners, this went without saying. But we know how ardently Nixon dreamed of rescuing our men before the November elections, or at least before his second inauguration. This mixture of motives and feelings is very much in the American vein, as recent events remind us. It never occurred to Thieu, on the other hand, presiding as he did over a country whose casualties were numbered in the hundreds of thousands, that the fate of a few hundred hostages could loom so large in an American President's mind.

Never, that is, until long after the event. Exhaling his bitterness in 1979, in an interview published by the German weekly *Der Spiegel,* Thieu said: "What he [Kissinger] and the U.S. government exactly wanted was to withdraw as fast as possible, to secure the release of U.S. prisoners. They said they wanted an honorable solution, but really they wanted to wash their hands of the whole business and scuttle and run. But . . . they did not want to be accused of abandoning us. That was the difficulty."

An understandable bitterness, but misdirected and unfair—such was the gist of Kissinger's reaction to the *Spiegel* interview. And so he privately wrote to Thieu, who now lives in London, in January 1980: "I continue to believe that the balance of forces . . . could have been maintained if Watergate had not destroyed our ability to obtain sufficient aid . . . from the Congress in 1973 and 1974. Had we known in 1972 what was to come in America, we would not have proceeded as we did."

There is something moving in this letter—almost (but not quite) a *mea culpa* from a man little noted for brooding on his own mistakes, although he has repeatedly made the point, as readers of his memoirs will remember, that statesmen are often obliged under the pressure of events to make fateful decisions on the basis of insufficient or uncertain information. But this is not one of the wittily rueful obiter dicta that adorn Kissinger's memoirs; here he is writing to a man who now

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sees himself consigned to a sort of hell, the ruin of his people, and protesting—sincerely, no doubt—that his intentions were good. The fact remains that both the balance of forces and the American will to provide sufficient aid were profoundly affected, before Watergate, by Kissinger's negotiations (over a period of four years) with Le Duc Tho.

Thieu, in any event, never replied to Kissinger's letter, although he allowed Hung to include it in *The Palace File*.

* * *

PHAN DINH PHUNG, after whom "my" street in Saigon was named, was a distinguished scholar, the leader of a 19th-century movement against the French. After the surrender of the boy emperor, Ham Nghi, he stubbornly continued the struggle, was betrayed, captured, and punished, according to Phan Boi Chau's *History of the Downfall*, in a particularly barbarous manner: the bones of his parents were dug up and burned. This story still causes the Vietnamese to shudder, I am told, despite the many new forms of barbarism they have experienced in more recent times, presumably because something more precious than Phung's corporeal existence was at stake: his spiritual links to home and homeland, to the generation of the departed and the generations to come, symbolized by the graves of his parents and the household altar where the ancestral spirits were enshrined.

To what extent these beliefs still hold I never was able to learn, my friends in Saigon being of different minds on the subject, and there was little time to talk about such things. But it was because of these graves and altars that the Vietnamese were said to be so deeply attached to the villages they have been fleeing from in such surprising numbers since the war.

* * *

FOR outsiders there is nothing more difficult than to understand and measure the persistence of old ways of thinking in evolving cultures, especially in those that are violently invaded by new ideas—first, because the point of departure, the original mind set, remains so foreign to us, and then because it is not a person whose thinking and behavior we are trying to understand, which would be complicated enough, but an infinitely various people who reflect the old and the new in an infinite variety of modes and combinations, so that we are driven to oversimplify what otherwise we would be unable to grasp at all.

This can lead to gross misjudgments, as when Frances FitzGerald in her immensely successful *Fire in the Lake* (1972) argued that there was a profound harmony, an almost mystical accord, between the praxis of the Vietnamese Communists and the ancient system of values and beliefs—that Communism, in short, was not only the wave of the future in that unhappy country but also, curiously, the wave of the past.

This book created a considerable stir, as I recall, because it was no longer merely saying that our intervention in Southeast Asia was ill-conceived and doomed, which many had said before, but that it would be a good thing if the other side won. But then it did win, and our allegedly wise and prescient adversaries, with their deep roots in Vietnamese tradition, proceeded to wreak such horrors and atrocities on their people, and on the Laotians and Cambodians as well, that the cleansing fire in FitzGerald's lake, the Communist victory in Indochina, must now be seen as it is seen by millions of prisoners and refugees: as one of the worst disasters of our time. (Not that Miss FitzGerald has ever made her apologies to the boat people, as many other former supporters of the Vietnamese Communists have done.)

In Washington, once, I ran into Dang Duc Khoi, who used to serve on the staff of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and asked him to forget Frances FitzGerald's politics and tell me what he thought of her account of the old Vietnamese ethos. Generally, for reasons I *feel* rather than understand, the Vietnamese are loath to talk about their religion, but in this case Khoi was fairly rabid: "It's bullshit, she's got it all wrong." From which I concluded that Khoi was unable to forget Miss FitzGerald's politics, and let it go at that. Most of *Fire in the Lake*, after all, despite the promise of the opening chapter, is political: a rehash of the conventional wisdom of the Saigon press corps on the themes I encountered so often (since the correspondents came to see me every day) that I ended by keeping lists of them under such rubrics as VNNDG, meaning the Vietnamese Are No Damned Good, and VCTFT, meaning the Vietcong Are Ten Feet Tall, etc.—such being the foregone conclusions toward which questions, in that atmosphere, were almost always directed.

The point here is not that the conventional wisdom was wrong, or, for that matter, right, but that it was terribly lacking in background and context. Frances FitzGerald at least began with an attempt—practically unique in the journalism of the war—to understand the Vietnamese on something like their own terms. But knowing little to begin with, unable to speak or read Vietnamese, she was obliged to go to France and sit at the feet of Paul Mus, a renowned sociologist who had spent much of his life in Indochina.

There was no American Paul Mus, for the simple reason that we were not interested in the Vietnamese. We became intensely involved with them, perforce, but briefly; and what we learned about them was superficial and functional, as when our "grunts" learned to say *dee-dee* when they needed to move people in a hurry, or *ba-mee-ba*, when they wanted a beer. There were exceptions, of course, personal or professional, but on the whole we kept an extraordinary distance from these people, it seems to me now, even as we

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made our presence felt in every corner of the country. Indeed, the distance grew in direct proportion to our numbers.

* * *

THAT Phan Dinh Phung gave his name to our street is of little consequence to our story, unless it served to remind us that there were other possible paths to national liberation available to the Vietnamese, before and after the rise of Ho Chi Minh's Lao Dong, or Communist party. As Western imperialism ebbed, exhausted by Europe's internecine wars, Asia experienced a rebirth of self-assertion, confused and tentative at first, pulled this way and that by ancient popular traditions and modernizing impulses, so that the Vietnamese in their struggle against the French had access to a wide range of ideas and models, from the Japan of the Meiji restoration to the Japan of the postwar constitution, from the China of the Kuomintang to the China of Mao, not to mention phenomena intellectually if not geographically more distant, from Gandhi to Nehru to Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore.

What we now call Vietnam came under French colonial rule in the heyday of empire and had been subject to French cultural and economic influence for centuries. Vietnam's misfortune—and ours—was that the period of its decolonization coincided with the extraordinary vogue of Marxism among the French intelligentsia after World War II; and that the most talented and charismatic of its anti-colonial leaders, Ho Chi Minh, opted for Leninism early in his career and stuck to it as it evolved into Stalinism, brilliantly adapting its conspiratorial methods to local conditions, emulating (in the movement he forged) the energy and discipline of the Bolsheviks, their patience and also, alas, their peculiar unconcern with the consequences of their action on the people for whom, theoretically, it was undertaken. As they were the instruments of history, their conscience was always clear. Their task was neither to agonize about means nor to indulge in utopian blueprinting of the future, but to smash the old state and set up a new one, after which they would "proceed to build socialism," as Lenin said on the evening of the October *Putsch*, with only the foggiest notion of what this entailed.

So the accent of Ho Chi Minh's Lao Dong, or Communist, party was always on how to win, not on what it would do with its victory; and this helps to explain why the state the Communists wound up with in the North after the French gave up and went home remained essentially a war machine, geared and oiled and rigged for further fighting, and not much good for anything else.

But very good for that—especially since the Soviets and the Chinese seemed prepared to fuel the machine forever. It took some hubris to imagine that the soft, slothful, disorganized South could prevail against it or even survive, unless Hanoi could be persuaded to turn its energies elsewhere. But this was unlikely. In his long march to power Ho was known by many other names, and so was the Lao Dong, but the main thrust of their action was always the same: first against their Vietnamese rivals to establish their monopoly of the revolutionary project, so that no nationalist would have anywhere else to go; and only then against the foreigner.

The latter, whether French or American or Chinese, was condemned by the iron law of history; his departure could and should be accelerated by the *dau tranh*, the movement, but it was inevitable in the long run. The great thing was to ensure that it happened under the leadership of the anointed party, so that there could be no question, afterward, about who was in charge. Thus the Bolshevik praxis, carefully studied by Ho during his long exile in China, Moscow, and Western Europe, not only permitted but required him and his comrades to eliminate other nationalist leaders, even if this meant assassinating them or betraying them to the French police.

The name of the game was power, undiluted, unshared—and unlike the interminable and insufferable chatter of the Frenchified intelligentsia, so busy plotting against one another in the South, it was played for keeps. Indeed, the very existence of an independent South was intolerable, and the major affair of the North, once it had secured its base, was to put an end to it. With military supplies assured and the Northern population thoroughly regimented, only tactical concerns dictated prudence for a time. But all this, as my friend Khoi used to say, was *connu et archi-connu*, "clear beyond a shadow of a doubt," except to the contemporary versions of Lenin's "useful idiots" in the West.

He might have added that there were useful idiots in Saigon, too. The South was at once indubitably Vietnamese and indubitably different, and the number and quality of Southerners who said *vive la différence* were such that the Lao Dong was obliged for the moment to concoct an elaborate lie about its intentions, especially after news of how the common folk in the North were faring under Communist rule—stories of famine and bloody repression—began to seep through the bamboo curtain. Hence the creation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and its military arm, the Vietcong, every unit (as we now know from Hanoi itself) carefully controlled by its core of Lao Dong cadres; and the constantly reiterated promise that the South, until it rallied spontaneously to Communism, would be allowed to go its own way.

Connu et archi-connu! Instructed by experience, the Northerners who had fled to the South—now grown to more than a million—could hardly be expected to fall for this line, but there were others (increasingly as the Diem government disappointed and outraged them) who believed it and others

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who joined the NLF, or supported it for one reason or another, without believing it or half-believing it or simply hoping that something would happen to make it come true—enough of them to start the war against the South that was as fatal to them in the end as it was to the declared enemies of the Lao Dong.

So much for ancient history—and by way of explaining why the street of Hung's family was called Phan Dinh Phung. Most of the streets of central Saigon were renamed after the French left in honor of the heroes and slogans of the independence movement, ancient and modern, which the Republic of Vietnam claimed to incarnate in defiance of Hanoi. The republic's writ, to be sure, did not run everywhere in the South. During the Buddhist troubles of 1963 it did not always run the full length of Phan Dinh Phung. But now that South Vietnam had got rid of the nefarious and incompetent Diem and his brother—so I was told in Washington and Honolulu when I was briefed for my new assignment—it would pull itself together with our help and offer a haven to the nationalist forces that the Communists had repressed or extinguished in the North: to Catholics and Buddhists, political parties like the Dai Viet and VNQDD, as well as to the Southern sects and ethnic groups, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, the Chams and Khmers and Montagnards, that had either survived the age-old drift of the Vietnamese from the Red River delta toward the Mekong, or sprung up during the past hundred years under French imperial rule.

* * *

Arriving in Saigon in January 1965, with no inkling of the chaos we had unleashed by sponsoring the overthrow of Diem two years earlier, I thought it a reasonable proposition that, given time and tranquillity, the republic should be able to survive and enhance the world's varietal richness. The South had always been Vietnam's New Found Land or, more recently, its California, offering room and resources for all, and now—the curtain having come down in the North—a promise of freedom. It was a promise as yet more honored in the breach, to be sure, but the republic was barely seven years old and under siege from the day it was born. This much I had gathered from what I had heard and been able to read during the long journey from Geneva to Washington and then to Honolulu and Saigon.

Memory has a way of proliferating; the spirit bloweth where it listeth. The point I was making to begin with was simply that I had forgotten the name of Phan Dinh Phung. And the point of my point, no doubt, was that this was the manner of our involvement in Vietnam. In a few short years, a moment on the scale of history, we went from total obsession to a sort of amnesia. The map of that country was once engraved in our minds, and most of us now can no longer remember whether Hué, the old imperial capital, is north or south of Danang. But of course we cannot leave it at that.

Soon after my arrival, I was shocked to discover that the Communists controlled most of the countryside, in some cases outright, in others functioning as a sort of shadow government alongside the nominal authorities; and they were growing increasingly bold in the cities, where the junta of generals who had overthrown Diem had been pushed aside by Nguyen Khanh, an inept and buffoonish fellow who had been helped to power by an inveterate plotter named Thao.

Under General Khanh the remains of the administration so carefully constructed by Diem and his brother (also murdered in the coup) were dismantled, and any notion that there might be a respectable civilian alternative was rudely put down, so that the Southerners began to suspect with astonishment and terror what was in fact the case: that they were now adrift, and that those who had destroyed Diem's government had done so without the faintest idea of what was to take its place—except, being military men already accustomed to receiving their equipment, munitions, and training from us, that the Americans would provide.

But the Americans, for the moment, had nothing but military assistance to provide. They were willing and at that stage apparently even impatient to wage war, but aside from mouthing platitudes about freedom and justice and winning hearts and minds, and a generous readiness to bear the expense, they had no clue about how to rebuild a South Vietnamese polity. They simply had not thought that far ahead, nor did they think it their business, even now, so that years would pass before a group of the more reasonable army officers—the most capable of whom was Nguyen Van Thieu—would be able to put something viable together.

Two incidents come back to focus the absurd disorder of that time. In the first I am walking down a broad boulevard with Howard Simpson, an embassy officer who (being slated for transfer) is bequeathing to me some of his functions and what little he can of his vast experience, having served several tours of duty in Vietnam, beginning with one in the early 50's. Suddenly down the road comes a column of tanks and armored trucks, with an odd-looking Vietnamese officer standing in the turret of the lead tank, and Simpson stops short at the sight of him.

"Thao, you old bastard," he yells. "What's up?"

The officer, who is wall-eyed, pudgy, and grinning, raises his hand, stops the column, and shouts back: "Howie! How you?"

"Never mind how me! What in hell are you doing?"

"Nothing special, Howie. I am making a coup!"

He pronounced the *p* in coup, presumably to make it clear to a benighted American. And then the column moved on. What happened to the

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coup I do not recall. Those first weeks in Saigon were hectic, this being the period when the Vietnamese seemed to be coming up with a new government with each new phase of the moon. But far from being considered an amiable lunatic, Thao—who came of a wealthy Southern Catholic family and had a brother high in the apparatus of the Lao Dong in Hanoi—had an extraordinary talent for ingratiating himself with every faction. And throughout all this Thao held important posts in the South Vietnamese government and remained close to certain elements of the American establishment, especially the CIA—until, after Khanh fell, he was identified as an enemy agent by officers of Thieu's military security, tracked down, and killed. Ten years later the new Communist masters of Saigon confirmed that he had been one of theirs and proclaimed him a national hero, although there are South Vietnamese nationalists, I've been told, who still believe that he was playing a double game: a Machiavellian romantic, they say, who had read too much André Malraux.

What the CIA concluded, if anything, I never found out, but there must have been many in the agency, as there were elsewhere in the American establishment in Saigon, who were not surprised at the rapid disintegration of the republic in 1964 and 1965. These were people—the most eminent being Ambassador Frederick Nolting and General Paul Harkins, the predecessors of Lodge and Westmoreland—who had warned that by intervening as we did, with no assurance that anything better would follow the removal of Diem, we were creating a huge vacuum and assuming a responsibility for which we were quite unprepared. And this of course is exactly what happened. In the confusion that resulted, phenomena like Thao and Khanh flourished briefly while the Vietcong all but completed their conquest of the countryside and began (but still prudently) to strengthen their urban networks.

And this brings me to my second epiphany—a sad little joke told by my old friend Bui Diem, who was later to serve as Vietnamese ambassador in Washington. In his memoirs, Bui Diem* confesses that he had supported the overthrow of Diem in the hope and expectation that it would be followed (at our insistence, if necessary) by the creation of a constitutional government to which, he believes, the great majority of the South Vietnamese would have rallied. Instead, he says, the amorphous junta drifted "from incompetence to incompetence" and the stage was set for "a firm hand at the helm" which Khanh, if only because he was willing to act at that moment, was simply assumed to be:

> As a result, Khanh was treated from the start as a strongman who enjoyed America's staunch friendship. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was even sent to South Vietnam to stump the country with him, as a visible symbol that the United States stood beside the new leader. This kind of performance did not come naturally to McNamara. On one occasion he grasped Khanh's hand and declared, "*Vietnam muon nam!*" Unfortunately, whoever taught McNamara the Vietnamese phrase had neglected to also teach him the proper intonation. So instead of saying "Long Live Vietnam," what he actually said, to the vast amusement of his audience, was "Vietnam, lie down!"

* * *

IN THE FACE of all this, the failure of the Communists of the North and their Southern allies to win the "hearts and minds" of the city folk is surprising, to say the least. Perhaps it was simply a matter of time. But one reason, precisely, for the vast increase in the urban population that occurred in the early 60's was that the Saigon government, while progressively losing its grip on the countryside, was still able to afford some protection in the towns. From their sanctuaries along the borders, in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, the Communists could move forces in and out of the country to collect rice and recruits and to enlarge the "leopard spots" of "liberated territories" almost at will—so that, even if Saigon had a competent administration, the security problem could never be solved, only palliated, unless we did what Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk kept assuring the Communists that we would not do: go into the sanctuaries and "widen the war." Instead we relied on attrition to discourage an adversary who was willing and able to take a hundred casualties for every one of ours—and who in fact would sacrifice many hundreds of thousands of men in the coming decade and still field a force of twenty divisions for the final assault on Saigon.

Quite apart from the appeal of their ideology (always limited in the South) and the very real prestige they had acquired in defeating the French, the Communists of the North and their Southern allies were operating from positions of strength. It was the Soviet-Hanoi alliance that was the superpower in Southeast Asia; and the strength of the Communists on the ground was immeasurably bolstered by the sympathy of people everywhere who saw them as victims of imperialism heroically fighting for self-determination and freedom—and the United States in the role of a neocolonialist bully seeking to prop up a puppet regime. They were increasingly adept at generating and exploiting this perception, so deeply rooted in the guilt and self-doubt of the West, whereas the American leadership never learned to take it seriously or to factor it into its calculations. And yet, as we all know now, it was bound to be extremely important—perhaps decisive—in the end.

In short, everything favored the Communist

* *In the Jaws of History*, by Bui Diem with David Chanoff, Houghton Mifflin, 343 pp., $18.95.

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enterprise, and this would have been a good time for us to heed the counsel of prudence and declare not victory, as Senator Aiken of Vermont was to suggest some years later, but defeat: to leave the squabbling Southern generals to their own devices and take our advisers and Green Berets and AID administrators home to ponder the complexities of "nation-building" in Southeast Asia. Such an outcome would have been an unhappy one for the Southerners, but not so devastating as what was to happen ten years later. And it would have spared us an infinite grief.

Nowadays all this is so dreadfully obvious, *connu et archi-connu,* that one tends to forget how out of the question it was in 1965. Lyndon Johnson would not hear of it. The young press corps in Saigon (including such future antiwar activists as David Halberstam of the New York *Times*) would not hear of it, either—these being the hawkish fellows who had roused John Kennedy against Diem on the grounds that he was incapable of winning a war for which they, at least, were ready to "bear any burden, pay any price." And at home the great majority in Congress would not hear of it—not in any case without setting off a great national debate about "Who lost Indochina?"

So we sent in our troops and helped the generals sort themselves out and by dint of enormous sacrifices over the next five years created, or more exactly recreated, the situation half-jokingly described by Senator Aiken. By the early 70's, when we were withdrawing the last of our ground forces, the republic had a reasonably competent government and a credible army; and it had been largely freed—after the bloody paroxysm of Tet in 1968 and the joint U.S.-South Vietnamese operation in Cambodia in 1970—from the threat of internal subversion. Thus it was possible for the first time to issue weapons to village self-defense forces in areas once controlled by the Vietcong.

The North had not given up, of course, nor would it in the foreseeable future. But it could be contained as long as the South was willing to fight and we were prepared to supply the means required to maintain the military balance, including the occasional intervention of our naval and air forces.

So this was the upshot of what the Vietnamese think of as the "American war"—from 1965 to 1971. The South lived—dependent upon us, to be sure, but hardly more so than the North was dependent on Moscow. We could therefore now do as the good Senator suggested: declare victory, and go home.

* * *

NEEDLESS to say, this is not what we did—not quite, and therefore not at all. It is a complicated story, and *The Palace File* tells it well. Richard Nixon withdrew our armed forces as efficiently and rapidly as they had been inserted by Lyndon Johnson, and with the same sort of consultation with our allies, i.e., none, and meanwhile sent Henry Kissinger to conduct secret diplomacy with Le Duc Tho, which had the effect (however unintended) of assuring the Northerners that the prize would be theirs if they only persisted, and of suggesting to the Southerners that something sinister was afoot. At the end of the so-called peace process we persuaded, indeed forced, South Vietnam to put its head in a noose, the Paris Peace Accords of January 1973, while solemnly swearing that if the trap were sprung we would be there to cut the rope and chastise the villains.

All this was not only explicitly stated in Nixon's letters to Thieu but reinforced by military planning, e.g., inviting the South Vietnamese corps commanders to our air-force headquarters in Thailand to show them how precisely we were planning to target our attacks if the Communists violated the cease-fire. And then, of course, the trap was sprung, in full view of the world, and lo! we were not there.

In our entire history, Hung and Schecter maintain, there is no precedent for such a betrayal. But they immediately mitigate the condemnation by raising, if not settling, some obvious questions. How valid were the commitments of Nixon and Ford? Why were they never made public? Did Nixon and Kissinger cynically betray our allies in the hope of achieving a "decent interval"?

To these questions Kissinger replies, correctly, that it was not the practice in those days to make presidential letters public, and that in any case there was nothing secret about Nixon's determination to enforce the Paris agreement by military action if necessary. Both he and Nixon also indignantly deny that they were being cynical or merely looking for a "decent interval." On the contrary, Kissinger was, and remains, convinced that if not for Watergate, Nixon, with the same willingness that he had shown to take the political heat during the Christmas bombing of 1972, would have responded with air strikes to North Vietnamese violations.

I have no difficulty in believing this: it makes sense and follows logically from Nixon's public commitment to achieve a "peace with honor." But finally, of course, would it have made any difference? Even if we had intervened this time, wasn't Hanoi's victory inevitable in the end? Or would the changing foreign policy of China have brought a new factor into play on the side of an independent South Vietnam?

Etc., ad infinitum—interminable, tiresome, tantalizing questions, begetting more questions, and meanwhile, as Kissinger keeps reminding us in his memoirs, you are obliged to act, whether you have satisfactory answers or not.

Or not to act, which is what it came down to in March 1975. You are Gerald Ford, say, and the North Vietnamese, in open violation of the agreement that Kissinger had spent four years nego-

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tiating, are coming straight down over the central highlands to the coast and the highway to Saigon. The Soviets, in contemplation of realizing a return—at last—on a very old investment, have built them a pipeline through Laos and Cambodia, emerging at Loc Ninh, a couple of hours from the coast. But now the United States Congress, led by Jack Kennedy's younger brother and Lowell Weicker and Bella Abzug, has informed the notoriously "authoritarian" and "corrupt" Thieu regime (over your veto) that they will get no more help from us. Not a bullet. The South Vietnamese army is demoralized and crumbling, like the French and British in the face of Nazi Germany in June 1940. In a few days our ambassador and his staff will have to run for it, ignominiously, with at best a handful of our Vietnamese friends.

At this point, say, General Vogt, the commander of our air force in Thailand, flies over the area and reports that he has never seen anything like it: enemy tanks, artillery, half-tracks, personnel carriers, bumper to bumper—since there are only a couple of roads capable of carrying this kind of traffic—all the way down to the outskirts of Saigon. After groping around in the jungle for years, and dropping millions of tons of explosives on trees, we have a target. "A turkey shoot," Vogt calls it. We could make those roads look like the Sinai in 1967, after the Israeli air force destroyed Nasser's motorized columns in the desert.

What would you do? Does the congressional interdiction wipe out your responsibility to provide for the security of our people in Saigon? Would you order the air-force commander and the carriers cruising along the coast to wipe out all that congestion on the highways and give the South Vietnamese a chance to pull themselves together? And thereby, in all probability, even if the American public rallied to your support, open up a constitutional crisis as bitter as the one that almost led to the impeachment of Richard Nixon?

I don't know whether such a notion ever crossed Gerald Ford's mind. I doubt it. In any case, it's all behind us now. A great power cannot afford to throw good money after the bad and lose itself in remorse and introspection. . . . Or can it? Should it?

The last letter in *The Palace File* is from Thieu, begging for the help he had been promised again and again. It was never answered.

* * *

For all that it is born of Hung's sorrow and Schecter's indignation, their book remarkably keeps its cool. It has the tone and gait of a historical narrative, not of a political tract—recounting lucidly what happened to the government and people of the South after we turned away, which each of us did at different times, of course, depending on who we were and how we were related to the situation. In my case, for example, I quit the Paris delegation late in 1969, after Kissinger had begun holding his secret trysts with Le Duc Tho, and retired from the Foreign Service. During the period covered by *The Palace File*, I forgot the few words of Vietnamese that I had learned and gradually lost touch with my friends in Saigon.

As a national phenomenon, however, the amnesia that befell us can be dated with some precision: the Paris Accords were signed on January 27, 1973, instituting a cease-fire in place and various political arrangements, including an international supervisory commission in which no one believed. For the North Vietnamese this was merely a phase, albeit an important one, in their famous fight-talk-fight strategy. For Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger it was a culmination and a release. Planes could now at last be sent to Hanoi to pick up our prisoners, who had been subjected to torture and ignominy not only by the Communists but also by visiting American literati; and by mid-July the last of our combat battalions was gone from the South. On August 15, ignoring warnings that the Paris agreements would have to be enforced, the Congress of the United States decreed that there would be no more funds for American military action of any kind in Indochina.

Richard Nixon, by then, was in irremediable trouble, although impeachment proceedings were still many months away. For Cambodia the worst was yet to come, as it was for Saigon, but the news media would now be shifting their attention elsewhere—to the Middle East, for example, where Egyptian staff officers were once again bent over maps of the Sinai. "Vietnam," in the words of a well-known survivor of Camelot, "could now return to the obscurity it so richly deserved."

What happened thereafter is told—admirably, in my opinion—from a point of view that strikes us as surprising and rather odd for the simple reason that it is South Vietnamese; and to this we have not been accustomed. The effect is to remind us that we have been experiencing the war in a multitude of ways, "in-country," as we used to say, or out, through the pain and bewilderment of our soldiers, or as a quarrel with others and with ourselves—but always or almost always this dimension has been missing: the people about whom or for whom, allegedly, it was fought. For this alone, and quite apart from the hitherto unpublished letters and skillful narration, *The Palace File* deserves an attentive reading.

But there is nothing in *The Palace File* to equal the pathos of Hung's last visit to Washington, as the enemy tanks are closing in on Saigon. Congress is in recess and no one suggests that it might be called back. The idea is absurd. Gerald Ford is playing golf in Palm Springs. Hung wanders down the long empty corridors clutching his letters, which should have been published years ago. Thieu has always refused to publish them or even allude to them because they are marked top-secret and he feared to anger the lords of the Larger Kingdom, his last resort. Now it is too late.

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As he walks, Hung encounters two or three departing solons, including the Senator from Massachusetts, younger brother of the President who first committed American troops to South Vietnam. But Teddy is pressed for time, and makes it clear that his celebrated compassion has its limits; he will pay any price, bear any burden, to bring this conversation with Hung to an end.

And then there is Hung's last sad ill-attended press conference which is reported by some surly stringers on remote back pages, if at all. Someone, it seems, thought to ask Henry Kissinger about this obscure Vietnamese who claimed to have some letters which etc., and Kissinger said yes, letters had passed between Nixon and Thieu, but no, there was nothing newsworthy in them (which, although it scandalizes Schecter and Hung, was sadly true in the sense that there had been nothing secret about the promises that we as a nation, speaking through an almost unanimous Congress, were now unwilling to keep, no matter what).

And so it goes. Back in Vietnam, we are overwhelmed with pathetic detail: an incident with some soldiers and a roadblock, a talk with an old peasant woman, desperate attempts to save endangered people and equipment; clues to a situation that we could not deal with honorably and therefore resolved to forget. In this richness of reference and atmosphere the protagonists of *The Palace File* come alive and we begin to recover, curiously, not only the little we knew about these people, our friends and victims, but much that we surmised and lacked the time or wit or patience to understand. And now there is something odd, different, in this effort to remember what we never properly knew. Is there any point to it? The story, after all, ends no less badly than it did before. Only the configuration has changed—and the moral center. It used to be a story about us. Now it is a story about them.

* * *

NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT was the climactic year of the American war, or more specifically of the American phase of the thirty-year war, in Indochina. This was the year of the Tet offensive, a pyrotechnic display featuring dramatic scenes of fighting within the American embassy compound in Saigon and the unprecedented ferocity of the struggle for Hué, preceded—by barely more than a week—by the onset of the siege of Khesanh. All these actions ended badly, even disastrously, for the Communist attackers on the ground, but they inflicted heavy casualties, terrified the South Vietnamese population, and profoundly affected American morale.

The Communists, as they have since told us, were now deliberately trading what they called the "blood and bones" of their followers, especially of their Southern followers who might in any case prove troublesome after the the war, for political advantage in an arena they saw, quite correctly, as far more decisive than Hué or Khesanh. In Washington, the Defense Secretary had resigned, a month after the storming of the Pentagon by antiwar demonstrators; but the main thing was that this was an election year in the U.S., during which much of the Democratic party would behave as if it were already in opposition while Nixon, the Republican candidate, would mysteriously allude to a "secret plan" to end the American involvement—an echo of Eisenhower's "I shall go to Korea" promise of 1952. The North Vietnamese, who would later offend Henry Kissinger by instructing him on U.S. public opinion, could therefore deduce from the campaign posture of both candidates what they had already learned from the Soviet ambassador in Washington: that American policy—just as it had been based after 1963 on a national decision to stay in—would now have to conform to an equal and opposite consensus in favor of getting out.

On the other hand, the American war had given Thieu a victory of sorts: the Vietcong was finished, the delta increasingly secure, the government of the republic alive and in better shape than at any time since the early days of Diem. So Hanoi's problem was to make haste slowly: to accelerate the American departure sufficiently to deny the South time to consolidate its hold on the countryside and prepare for the PAVN's frontal assault; but not to such a point that the Americans, ceasing to take casualties and bearing a much lighter financial burden, would be able to install themselves in a garrison situation, as in Korea, and thus deprive the North of the prize it had sought for so long and at such great cost.

Richard Nixon, presumably, made similar calculations. For us, too, and for our allies, timing was crucial. Each move we made on the ground would have to be balanced against the effects it produced on our troops and at home. During the first five years of the American war our battle deaths had totaled some 16,000. By the end of 1968 the number had dramatically risen to 30,610. Disengagement began in 1969, but Hanoi saw to it that fighting remained heavy, with the result that another 10,000 Americans died in the course of the year. And the fact that we were now on our way out, in addition to affecting military morale, seemed to galvanize the most radical elements of the antiwar movement—those who were in fact pro-war, but on the enemy's side. In May 1970, for example, a few days after the start of a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia, four students at Kent State University in Ohio were shot and killed by National Guardsmen during a demonstration; and all across the country colleges shut down in protest. Still, the Cambodian invasion vastly improved the security of Vietnam's eastern provinces, including the great rice-growing area south of Saigon; and Thieu had reason to be proud of the conduct of his troops.

So it wasn't easy to draw up a statement of

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profit and loss. In this instance, my old friend Bui Diem, Thieu's ambassador to Washington, drafted a cable to Saigon to warn that Hanoi, on the whole, had come out ahead politically. So he tells us in his memoirs. But Thieu, with his Mandarin Confucian mentality, refused to take the point. The Cambodian action, he thought, was long overdue—as indeed it was.

However that may be, from the onset of the Nixon administration, as Kissinger began his secret talks with Le Duc Tho, our troops were removed from South Vietnam in increments corresponding (we said) to the growing ability of the South to defend itself—but also, obviously, to political calculations and pressures at home. It was the sort of thing we did well, and the process took on a life of its own. From our peak troop strength of 543,400 in the spring of 1969 we went to 24,200 in 1972; and the last of these were gone in the following year.

The ARVN, meanwhile, increased its complement from 820,000 to 1,048,000—an enormous effort, but insufficient to replace the shortfall in numbers and firepower; and the ARVN had become dependent on certain American command functions—intelligence and communications, especially—that the JGS was still far from being able to replace.

These were technical matters, and most Americans were happy to leave them to the experts. They wanted out, and expected that we would leave in an orderly and honorable way; and this general approval of Nixon's policy as it was understood was repeatedly confirmed by opinion polls and by the landslide Republican victory in the elections of 1972.

For the South Vietnamese, however, everything now hung on a thread. They knew that they could not have come this far without our help; and, having suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties during the preceding decade, they were physically and morally exhausted. Outnumbered, outgunned, with thousands of miles of porous frontiers and seacoast, they found themselves still facing a juggernaut, the PAVN, which could attack at will from sanctuaries in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, replace its losses from Soviet arsenals, and attack again. They knew that their country, for all the highly publicized faults of the Thieu government, was richer and freer than the North—but of what avail was such knowledge if Enlightened Opinion throughout the world decreed that Hanoi's nationalist credentials were more authentic, since it was Ho Chi Minh who had driven out the French; and if God, in any case, was on the side of the bigger battalions?

To continue to fight under such circumstances, the South Vietnamese had to believe in our ultimate commitment to their survival. This had always been difficult for a variety of reasons, the most obvious of which was that a great many Americans did not believe in it and said so. But of course it was also difficult for the Vietnamese, if not impossible, to interpret the many varieties of opposition to the war. So most of them tended, like Thieu, to shrug the American opposition—Hanoi's hope and comfort—away.

* * *

For the Southerners, the core of the problem was elsewhere: *they could not see our interest*, even when our involvement was at its height; and it became increasingly hard for them to grasp as we began to withdraw. The Vietnamese I knew, or more precisely met, in Saigon and a few years later in Paris, were incomparably more sophisticated than the villagers who made up the great mass of the population; yet even they astonished me by their ignorance of our world—which was almost as great as my ignorance of theirs.

The Southern bourgeoisie was composed for the most part of villagers once or twice removed, with bits of property somewhere in the delta or up north; or Chinese merchants with Vietnamese names; or professional people, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and (for some mysterious reason) an inordinate number of pharmacists. They had been to French schools, usually, and had absorbed a little elementary history, but this did not include the doctrine of containment. Obviously, our intentions were not colonial, as some had hoped and others feared; we built no plantations and did no business, except with each other. The great bases we built at Danang, Long Binh, Camranh Bay suggested a strategic interest, but by the early 70's we were turning these over to the government of South Vietnam. Rumors kept cropping up to the effect that oil, or some other natural resource, had been discovered; but none was confirmed.

Of course, there was our rhetoric, and we had certainly put our money where our mouth was, but this still begged the question—especially now that we were leaving—of *why*. Why had we come to save them at such horrendous cost in the first place? Why had we, visibly not the most patient of peoples, adopted a strategy that carefully preserved Hanoi's ability to inflict pain on us and prolong the war? And why, since we had now apparently become embroiled in some obscure but important crisis of our own, *chez nous*, should we continue to concern ourselves with theirs?

I am not talking about peasants, for whom the great thing throughout the centuries of Chinese domination, warring kingdoms, and French colonialism had always been to discern who (in the immediate vicinity) had the "Mandate of Heaven"—i.e., the actual power to recruit their sons and confiscate their rice—but about their city cousins, especially those who had a modicum of education and the prestige that goes with it in Confucian society.

The vast majority of these, including the minority who were or who had been tempted by the NLF, were anti-Communist and anxious to keep

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Hanoi at arm's length. "*Kaplan-oi*," I heard them saying. "Is this possible? Are you Americans for real?" And I used to hold imaginary conversations with them, lucidly explaining that the political and military mistakes we had made, appalling as they were, only increased our obligation to set things right; that the American people continued to believe that world peace was threatened if the Communists were allowed to believe that they could extend their empire by military force; and that, as a great power, we could not in any event afford to let the South Vietnamese down, lest we come to be considered more dangerous to our friends than to our enemies.

In fact, however, this subject of our ultimate interest practically never came up, perhaps because it was too important. These people had a way that comes back to me now of tiptoeing around a fateful issue with a sort of superstitious tact. Most, it seemed to me, had simply given up trying to understand. They believed in our commitment, if and when they did, for no rational reason at all: because it was the only alternative to despair. But to carry on they constantly needed reassurance. And in this respect, alas, the *manner* of our withdrawal was the final disaster.

* * *

SECRECY is a normal and necessary mode of diplomacy, but in this case it was counterindicated, as a diplomat might put it, because it played precisely into Hanoi's hands. Quite apart from the unsettling effect it had on the South Vietnamese, it was inevitable that the secrecy of the negotiations leading to the Paris Accords would discourage public interest in the United States—especially after the agreement in principle was signed and the haggling about details began. If there was any chance of committing this country to the responsibilities implicit in the Paris Accords—the culmination, after all, of an enormous national effort—it was in using the presidential pulpit to the utmost and insisting that Congress and the media be informed of the entire process, all along the way.

This is easier to say than it would have been to do, given Hanoi's opposition and Nixon's impatience. And no one could foresee in 1969, when Kissinger first slipped into Paris for a rendezvous with Le Duc Tho, what would happen to the Nixon presidency at the beginning of his second term. Yet, to stand the Clausewitzian formula on its head, the peace could only be "a continuation of the war by other means." An agreement with the Communists, *any* agreement with the Communists, would have to be enforced. And this meant that the country had to be prepared for a continuing effort, insignificant in comparison with what we had been doing, but irksome; and, as in South Korea, with no end in sight.

To be sure, the mills of Watergate were now grinding, and it was late in the day to commit this country to anything in Southeast Asia, after ten years of a war conducted so incoherently, beyond the stand-off implied in Nixon's formula: an honorable peace. There was no public clamor to know what Kissinger was up to in Paris. It was as if Congress, the press, and the academic world from which he had so surprisingly come were relieved to let him rid them of this tiresome business at last.

Of the negotiations, in any event, nothing or almost nothing was known until 1970. For once there were no leaks from the American side. And thereafter, until Secretary of State Rogers and the Vietnamese foreign ministers were summoned to Paris for the signing, the public knew only that Kissinger was conducting talks with Hanoi on the one hand and with Saigon on the other. It was understood that the latter, on the whole, was being at least as stubborn and difficult as the former; and this fed the growing anti-South-Vietnamese passion that had begun to inhabit certain corners of the Congress. But the details, excepting those that the Communists chose to reveal for the purposes of psychological warfare, remained obscure. For his part, Thieu never went public with his objections to the form and content of Kissinger's talks with Le Duc Tho. One can only speculate about the reasons for his discretion—but who can doubt now that it was a fatal mistake?

In January 1969, as Kissinger was organizing his new office in the White House, the magazine *Foreign Affairs* appeared with an article in which he—writing as a Harvard professor—makes an elementary point about negotiations with the Vietnamese:

> To survive, the Vietnamese have had to learn to calculate—almost instinctively—the real balance of forces. If negotiations give the impression of being camouflaged surrender, there will be nothing left to negotiate. Support for the side which seems to be losing will collapse. Thus, all the parties are aware—Hanoi explicitly, for it does not view war and negotiation as separate processes; we in a more complicated bureaucratic manner—that the *way* negotiations are carried out is almost as important as *what* is negotiated.

To which one can only say amen. But the newly appointed National Security Adviser then proceeded to deal directly with Hanoi, just as we in the Harriman-Vance mission had conducted "exploratory talks" a year or so earlier. Only, this time, the South Vietnamese were not even briefed after each meeting; for a long time they were not briefed at all. No serious consideration was ever given to Thieu's insistent demand that, since it was the fate of his people that hung in the balance, his government should be directly involved.

And thus, over the next four years, the Republic of Vietnam, which even the Soviets had once been willing to recognize, was delegitimized, in direct contradiction to what we were saying in

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South Vietnam and to the world, and indeed to all that we had spent so much blood and treasure to assert since 1965—namely, that Saigon was the rightful government of the South and, given the wherewithal, would eventually be able to take care of itself.

* * *

To provide the wherewithal we had a program called Vietnamization. In practice it meant that we left behind hundreds of millions of dollars worth of materiel, much of it useless to Thieu's armed forces because they lacked the facilities for repairing and maintaining it, and said in effect: goodbye and good luck and don't hesitate to call. And for the first couple of years or so there was usually someone, however distracted, at the other end of the line. With the materiel went certain training programs, some of them reasonably effective; and at least two or three South Vietnamese divisions were—by 1972—equipped and organized and led in a manner that made them equal if not superior to any units of comparable size that the PAVN could muster. But they were far too few, and the ARVN was fatally weak (after the withdrawal of MAC-V) at the general-staff level.

Meanwhile the Communists, as expected, began violating the cease-fire immediately, just to make their point: small probing actions at first, increasingly bold as they discovered just how far it was possible to go without eliciting a reaction from us. The Soviets were now giving them the full panoply of their equipment, including helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft; and then there was that ominous pipeline; and the reconstruction of their base areas in Cambodia, from which the Khmer Rouge could be unleashed to attack Phnom Penh and the PAVN to move eastward to control the vital centers of the South.

All in good time. By the spring of 1974 it was clear that Hanoi need not worry about going too far, the Congress and the people of the United States being otherwise engaged. The Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives began its television inquiry into the possible impeachment of Richard Nixon on May 9. Few noticed, two weeks later, when the House voted to gut the budget for military aid to South Vietnam. This was a signal, if any were needed, to both sides.

Still, the war would drag on for another year, until the final spasm which began with the PAVN offensive against Ban Me Thuot on March 10, 1975. Indeed, Hanoi did not anticipate that things would move so swiftly. In January a Northern division had been moved across the river from Cambodia to occupy Phuoc Long—not much of a drive, a few hours, perhaps an afternoon, from my house on Phan Dinh Phung. There was no reaction from our air force and this, when the ARVN began to crumble in the central highlands, must have told the Northerners that they could now drive on to Saigon unimpeded. On the coast, Danang, where our marines had come ashore ten years earlier, fell on March 10. On April 10 President Ford's last pro-forma request for funds was turned down by the House; it was already unlikely that such funds would ever be spent. One last ARVN division held the Communists up before Saigon for a few days, inflicting heavy casualties until its munitions were spent and most of its men were dead. Saigon fell on April 30.

In the last twelve years of Vietnam's thirty-year war, during which we destroyed Diem's republic, which we had helped to create, then encouraged Thieu to set up another that might have survived and even prospered, and finally tired of the whole business and turned it all over to Hanoi, we ourselves had suffered over 300,000 casualties and more than 57,000 dead; inflicted enormous damage on both North and South Vietnam; induced our South Vietnamese allies to hope and fight and suffer even greater—far greater—human losses than our own; spent billions upon billions of dollars in the manner best calculated to distort and inflate our economy for years to come; built a lavish and immensely useful naval base for the Soviets to inherit at Camranh Bay, thus tilting the strategic balance in their favor in the South Pacific; disrupted and almost destroyed civil society and the idea of national service in our own country and—but need I go on? The disaster was and remains incalculable. And yet we turned away from it and went about our business, beginning to forget Vietnam even before it was over.

* * *

Amnesia, I am told, is the response of the organism to an intolerable inner trouble. But this is a response that we cannot afford. It deprives us of a vital dimension. Memory, however painful, is better. My old friend Raymond Aron used to say that history, which is after all a form of memory, cannot really help us solve our present problems; we learn nothing from it, he said, but history itself. So much for that old tag that people are forever quoting from Santayana, to the effect that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. But this is not to say that it is useless to think about the past. What we choose to remember, and how, is part of the process by which we become what we are.

So now, I would suggest, it is time to remember what we did and failed to do in Vietnam. We cannot be content with the nightmarish fantasies of combat that our novelists and film-makers have given us. They were part of the experience, to be sure. But books like *The Palace File* and Ellen Hammer's *Death in November* remind us that this war was not simply devised as a test of our young manhood or a mindless horror show. There was more to Vietnam than "all that."

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A Light Unto the Nations?

Ruth R. Wisse

DEAR B——,

In the absence of a letter from you I am reading those of the "father of Zionist socialism," Moses Hess—the ones that make up his 1862 book *Rome and Jerusalem*.

Hess is immensely appealing. He seems to have discovered Zionism quite on his own, in the course of rejecting the racism of conservative Germans and the ideological anti-Semitism of European revolutionaries. I like the very homey, unsystematic thrust of his argument in the letters, promoting the cause of a revitalized nation in the organic imagery of seeds and flowers rather than in the capitalized abstractions favored by his German philosophical contemporaries. When he speaks of the human family, he explains that his image of it grows straight from his mother's love, which is not only the emotional but the fructifying intellectual origin of his own love for mankind:

> Judaism has never drawn any line of separation between the individual and the family, the family and the nation, the nation and humanity as a whole, humanity and the cosmos, nor between the creation and the Creator. . . . Judaism is rooted in the love of the family; patriotism and nationalism are the flowers of its spirit, and the coming regenerated state of human society will be its ripe fruit.

You once told me of your bar-mitzvah teacher, who demonstrated that all men are brothers by drawing a stick figure of the biblical Adam at the top of a page and a geometric progression of his offspring beneath. Hess is similarly convinced that the Jewish idea of loving wholeness—whose highest philosophic interpreter he believes to be Spinoza—can inspire the fraternal reform of human society.

From his innocent enthusiasm about this project you would not guess that Hess was trying to defuse an explosive idea. He knew that this view of the Jews as an organic family had begun to gain threatening force in Europe. The robust family of his description was perceived by others as a conspiring clan, like the ubiquitous Rothschilds who were building their international banking empire across otherwise divided frontiers. "The German hates the Jewish religion less than the race," he wrote with unnerving sobriety. "He objects less to the Jews' peculiar beliefs than to their peculiar noses." Even after the Jew had done everything to accommodate himself to the surrounding majority—shaved his beard, adopted local dress, mastered German, proved himself an outstanding musician/philosopher/businessman—the Germans still objected that he was only trying to camouflage his essential and ineradicable Jewishness.

Nothing daunted by this accusation, Hess cheerfully agreed that the Jews could never become good Germans. The Germans' abstract passion for "pure human nature" was really an excuse to seek domination over all other races, and made *them* the most dangerous people in Europe. As for the French, who had struggled for liberty, equality, fraternity, they represented to Hess the ideal of brotherhood. Then there was Italy, and specifically the resurrection of Rome as the capital of a reawakened modern Italian nation, which inspired Hess with a model for the resurrection of Jerusalem. But his optimism about nationalism in general derived from his idea of a reconstituted and deeply ethical Jewish nation that would illumine the international arena.

And buoyant he was, the sunny forecaster of a reawakened people that would rebuild its homeland in the land of Israel. He thought that the national movements gaining force in Europe were not only compatible with humanism but a guarantor against the leveling tendencies of technology and conformism. Many nice people of Europe were mistakenly trying to establish closer ties among all the nations of the world by denying the typical, creative characteristic of each. Against this destructive uniformity he appealed to the original organic community—the Jews.

To Hess, the history of the Jews proved that na-

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tions were not so easily dissoluble, and that the moral energy of their survival was a force for good, not evil. As a child he had seen his grandfather, in the synagogue, mourning the destruction of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, and had heard him pray for the return of the Jews to Zion. He had been told the story of Mother Rachel weeping at her tomb in Hebron when the soldiers of Nebuchadnezzer drove the children of Israel into exile after destroying the holy city. This parental love had sustained the children of Israel through centuries of dispersion and ensured their eventual return. Hess championed the restoration of the Jewish state less as an antidote to European anti-Semitism than as the harbinger of a variegated world community.

YOU CAN see why even at this historical remove the letters of *Rome and Jerusalem* are so inspiring. The courage it took to stand up to Karl Marx on the one flank and the German-Jewish reformers on the other—to the radicals and liberals of his day who were also his peers and his friends—thrills me no less than does the rare manifestation of such courage in our own time and place. Yet I have to confess that Hess's mixture of politics and metaphysics also makes me uneasy, especially when applied to a people already the subject of too much mystification. The quality of national character can have nothing to do with a nation's right to exist, and, unless you are God, the argument for a national homeland dare not be made on grounds of national merit.

I think I understand how the two became fused in the mind of someone like Moses Hess, who had for a long time been under the exclusive influence of Western European thought, and who was stung by the assumptions of German superiority. Ashamed of having once judged his own culture by the standard of those who wanted only to destroy it, and freshly convinced of the moral grandeur of Jewish civilization, he wanted to reveal the power of the Jewish national idea. He had also to make his fellow Jews admire the achievement of their own culture if they were to embrace their legitimate national existence. The admirability of Jewish achievement was hence offered as evidence of Jewish national legitimacy—a fatal mixture, since it appeared to make the legitimacy contingent on the admirability.

This remains the Jewish humanist's—and in this case, the Jewish socialist's—very special, very deadly temptation. Once he feels, or regains, a measure of national confidence he tends to be so dazzled by his moral force that he would just as soon be judged on his merits as accepted for an equal. He does not believe in the religious basis of Jewish election, but in a secular echo of its special claims, or because the demonic image of his enemy seems to require of him a rebuttal in kind, he tries to prove his moral prowess instead of demanding his due. He is like the son of a murdered tightrope walker who insists on waiving the net to prove his nerve, forgetting that his father was killed not through lack of skill but by the rival who cut the rope. I don't have kind thoughts for Jews who do the moral strut.

LAST Wednesday I found myself at a veritable Strutters' Ball. For my cousin Gaby's fiftieth birthday her husband had invited a group of us to the restaurant Tournant de la Rivière just outside Montreal, where with the porch to ourselves and a very long evening through five courses, we drifted from the delightful world of French cuisine into our own. The flow of our conversation into its habitual current was as simple as the turn of the river beyond our window.

We were talking tennis, Gaby of a set she had won from me earlier in the day and the men of some new-style rackets, when someone brought up Israel's new line of tennis players: how about their Davis Cup win over Czechoslovakia! You can probably fill in the rest. After Czechoslovakia, Israel had to play India, which had refused Israel admission a year earlier when it hosted the table-tennis tournament. So we expressed indignation over India's discriminatory practices, and satisfaction that this time India had decided to abide by the rules. But this was not enough. By the time we were through, it was not India's but Israel's behavior that had become the subject, with the main issue being whether Israel should have spared India the embarrassment by agreeing to play in a third country, and thereby demonstrated to the world that Jews are above its petty politics.

How often have you seen this Jewish sleight of hand, the almost imperceptible shift from the moral failings of others to our own putative moral strength? We were discussing sport, whose charm is the guaranteed equality of rules within which individuals or teams can compete. Suddenly we are brought up short and reminded that even in this charmed sphere the Jewish state is not guaranteed equality. India panders to Arab hatred of Israel by excluding Israel whenever it can (to no great international outcry), admitting it only when faced with disqualification. Israel is singled out for the crime of its existence, and made to test the principles of equality on which international sport, like international law, depend. But certain Jews are prepared to turn discrimination into a test of the Jewish state, a chance to show off the vaunted Jewish moral superiority.

To see how dangerous this reflex can be, consider the *aftermath* of the massacres at the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982. On the facts of the massacre itself there seems to be agreement: while Israeli troops were still in Lebanon, Christian militiamen killed 460 people, about half of them women and children, in the two refugee camps near Beirut. It needs to be said that the slaughter was an act of retalia-

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tion for earlier massacres by Palestinian terrorists, and also that these terrorists deliberately placed women and children in their military bases as a tactic of moral intimidation. But no provocations by the PLO could justify the militia's hand-to-hand killing of civilians, and the ensuing swell of outrage in the West was a reasonable expression of its disgust.

Israelis may have felt a special horror. These marauding Lebanese Christians were, after all, the potential "ally" of Israel in the peace settlement it had been seeking in the Middle East, and its real ally during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. One had had higher hopes than this for Christian forces. There was also the troubling question of indirect responsibility. If the Israelis were in temporary military control of the area in which the massacre occurred, they had to wonder about sins of omission, a failure to foresee and to prevent it.

But others had actually committed the murders. Where are the killers now? Has anyone put a price on their heads? Why are they not hunted down so that they might be brought to trial and given the punishment they deserve? If the outrage was so great and the crime so brutal, where was the call for justice?

In truth, there was no moral outrage and no desire for retribution. The massacre was morally interesting only as a moment of reckoning with the Jews, an opportunity to apply that tired but still vigorous double standard according to which Jews should be "more Catholic than the Pope," and which insists on monitoring them for their purity. As soon as the government of Israel agreed to investigate its failure to prevent the massacres, real evil was welcome to run free.

Do I hold Israel responsible for the escape of the murderers as others wanted to hold it responsible for the murders themselves? Of course not. Yet who can deny that the publicized inquiry into *Israeli* complicity helped to obscure the traces of the killers and the cycle of violence that continues? Israel, instead of demanding that its own inquiry be linked to a serious pursuit of the murderers, instead of asking Christians and Muslims to see to *their* morality, responded to the accusation of criminality by providing a convenient diversion, agreeing to stand alone in the dock. "I am glad to be held to a higher standard," says the moral supremacist, as though his morality rather than theirs were the legitimate concern of the world. As though even the highest standard of Jewish behavior could be a substitute for the decency of others. The transference to the international arena of a people's desire for holiness is a tragic mistake with potentially tragic consequences. By assuming even a fraction of the guilt that is not rightly his, the moral supremacist betrays the cause of righteousness in which he says he labors.

Of course I know what would have greeted me had I tried this line of argument at Gaby's party. "Don't *you* believe that Jews ought to aspire to exemplary morality?" "Why, in fact, should we not hold the Jewish state to a higher standard of behavior? Aren't we supposed to be 'a light unto the nations'?" Strutters do not appear to recognize the difference between moral striving (the direction of which, in politics even more than in private life, is always open to debate) and political scapegoating. In politics it is not God who holds Israel to a double standard, but fellow states which refuse to credit its legitimacy. Jewish morality is no more likely to win over the enemy than Jewish immorality ever occasioned his enmity in the first place. Yet the moral strutters think they recognize a continuity between the Jew's election to carry the burden of the Law at Sinai and the choice of the modern Jew as a prime target of international discrimination. They want Israel to prove its holiness to India and the world the way we Jews once undertook to prove our holiness to the Supreme Judge.

UNFORTUNATELY, this attitude has deep roots. I think it has been with us since modern Jewish thinkers began to ascribe to their ideologies the same claims to election they had formerly professed as devout Jews. Moses Hess, for example, could not accept religious election as the continuing source of Jewish morality because he no longer believed in a God of revelation, or in a God Who mattered. At the same time, his respect for Jewish civilization—for the consequences of the Jewish contract with God through the millennia—made him eager to preserve his people's historical mission. The Jews mattered even if God did not. So he tried to identify the moral core of Jewishness with the emergent socialist faith in an egalitarian, responsible state that would be a new earthly example to the nations.

The resulting idea of Jewishness, when undertaken by someone as richly endowed as Hess was with sensitivity, sympathy, and knowledge, could be morally persuasive and, for one generation at least, even culturally satisfying. But there are serious flaws in the argument. As long as the Jewish claim to election had rested on the Jew's acceptance of Halakhah, a way of life that derives from the granting of the Law at Sinai, it was open to all people alike. The Torah was a "tree of life" to all who clung to it, and everyone prepared to cling to it could become a Jew. Ruth the Moabite serves as the model for all proselytes to Judaism, who are invited to recognize a sign of their authenticity as Jews in the divine promise that the messiah himself will descend from her lineage.

But how, other than through Jewish birth, can you become a *Jewish* socialist or a *Jewish* humanist? And if you cannot *become* a Jewish socialist, is it not a form of racism to claim that Jewish socialists or a Jewish socialist state are potentially

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"a light unto the nations"? Do Jewish socialist parents in Israel or elsewhere teach their children that they are expected to be more moral than French or Danish socialists because they were born to them rather than in France or Denmark? In any case, if their ethics derive from a political program, then the program rather than the accident of their birth must be the source of their moral education and hence the determinant of their moral actions. The rational basis of socialism precludes any claim for the superiority of the Jews.

With one apparent exception: when Jews are singled out for mistreatment. The idealistic young Jews who opposed the autocratic abuses of the czarist regime in Russia, Moses Hess who defended the Jews against the Teutonic will to crush them, cloaked themselves and their politics in the language of prophetic righteousness. Our friends think they see the same pattern at work when India discriminates against the Jewish state, thereby giving it an opportunity to lead the struggle for decency. But the parallels are quite false. The ancient Jews were fighting for a way of life that set them apart. Their claim to morality was not inherent in their struggle, much less in themselves, but in their vision of God, their acceptance of God's Law, and in their determination to obey it. They had to maintain this way of life, which was inherently Jewish, against all who would crush it, crushing God's will.

In the modern period, being singled out for mistreatment was something altogether different for Jews who no longer believed in their divine election or in Jewish religious observance. Could anti-Semitism be an occasion for improving the world if the Jews against whom it was directed no longer followed a superior way of life? Two antithetical movements said Yes. One sought the enlistment of the modern Jew in a cause "higher" than his own, in a modern ideological system that went beyond the teachings of the rabbis; the other insisted on the Jew's own national legitimacy as part of the fabric of a modern pluralistic world community. Both movements held that the Jewish struggle, sublimated in the first instance, self-affirming in the second, could still be interpreted as an assertion of the good against oppressive powers.

These alternatives did not prove equally benign. The sublimated striving for righteousness led straight to hell. True, there were Jewish idealists who pioneered the trade unions and remained democrats. But the Jewish revolutionaries, Communists, and pro-Communists who justified expropriation, violence, and murder in the name of higher egalitarian ideals should disabuse us once and for all of the notion that Jews are innately more moral than other peoples. The readiness of so many individual Jews to serve and to justify the most repressive political system in the world exposes the false claims of any "Jewish" morality apart from the morality of the Jewish Law. When it comes to Jewish enthusiasm for the great egalitarian project, I think we may be grateful that we are such a small people.

For its part, the Jewish struggle for self-determination did remain an agent of liberalization, even within the revolutionary movement. When, for example, the members of the Jewish Socialist Bund insisted on their national legitimacy, they were resisting Lenin's concentration of power, whether or not that was their stated intention. This is why he opposed them so strenuously, and had them crushed in the Socialist International. Yet something of their independent spirit survives in the Soviet Jewish refuseniks of today. These Jews are called refuseniks because they were refused their request to emigrate to Israel, but their refusal is also active, not passive: like the gnat in talmudic legend that made its way into the brain of Titus and drove him insane with its buzzing, they refuse to be intimidated in a system that depends for its power on the ability to impose firm order on all. The Jewish will to be Jewish implicitly defies totalitarian hegemony. Since the Soviet Jew can hardly control the larger political forces that he serves, he can vouch for the morality of his cause only when he acts on his own behalf.

ZIONISM was on even sounder moral ground than Bundism in its insistence on national self-determination—as long as it did not fall into the trap that Hess had unwittingly set for it, which was to combine the political ideal of a state with the secularized ideal of a holy nation. The fraudulence of Hess's original conception was exposed almost at once. Hess predicated his idea of a holy Jewish people on the model of the illustrious French! He wrote: "The Jewish nation . . . must not hesitate to follow France in all matters relating to the political and social regeneration of nations, and especially in what concerns its own rebirth as a nation. . . ."

What a bitter joke on the idea of a national character! Some thirty years after Hess extolled the brotherliness of the French, to him the essence of their collective political identity, the Dreyfus case inspired Theodor Herzl to create a state to save the Jews from the French. France was the model, all right—the model of the fate that would befall Jews if they remained dispersed throughout Europe in a period of emerging nation states. Hess certainly proved prescient in his generalization about the Germans, but it is worth remembering that his high-minded prophecies were based on correspondingly erroneous generalizations about the French.

Initially, of course, France had also seemed to the young Theodor Herzl the guarantor of European enlightenment and emancipation. He, too, coming from Vienna, had found in France the ideal modern state, which, in enfranchising the

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Jews, also set them an example of democracy, of tolerance, of refuge from political oppression. Hence his shock at the sight of the Paris mob shouting "Death to the Jews!" He would not have felt the humiliation so keenly had France not figured earlier as his promised land.

The crowd's hysteria threatened Herzl's deepest liberal faith. He wrote in his diary: "One Jew an alleged traitor and down with all the Jews? And where? In republican, modern, civilized France, 100 years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man!" Listen to his stunned disbelief. He was dazed not so much by the threat to the Jews as by the threat to himself, the civilized cosmopolitan, for whom the Declaration of the Rights of Man was the new Ten Commandments, the new Sermon on the Mount. Watching that frenzied anti-Semitic mob, he must have felt as Moses did when, coming down from the mountain with the perfect law for an exalted people, he found them dancing around a golden calf. When the shock began to wear off, however, Herzl went back up the mountain: Zionism was his revised attempt to rescue the liberal faith.

Because Herzl is the founder of the modern Jewish national movement, Jews inevitably parochialize his legend. Frightened, they say, by the intensity of European anti-Semitism, Herzl determined to save his people from destruction. This is true from the point of view of the Jews, but not true enough. Herzl's people were the Europeans, among whom he was keen to include his own tribe, the Jews. Zionism was his proposed solution not merely to the Jewish problem but to the European problem: if anti-Semitism could call into question the rational premises upon which French democracy rested, one would have to strengthen its rational premises by eliminating the anti-Semitism.

Moses Hess, troubled by the same problem, had blamed anti-Semitism on the German national character and found his solace in the higher national tolerance of the French. The Germans made him see the need for a Jewish homeland; the French made it seem less urgent. For Herzl, who witnessed the moral collapse of France, no refuge was left. But no more than Hess was he prepared to surrender his optimistic belief in the perfectibility of human society through the rational acts of men and women.

This optimism was the source of what otherwise strikes us as Herzl's chutzpa or madness—his confidence that Gentile rulers and assimilated Jews alike would come to his assistance. He trusted them to join him in the crusade to cure Europe of its hatred because he was convinced of the benefit that would accrue to all once the target of hatred was removed. Zionism was the last hope of European civilization, for unless Europe could find a rational and just solution to the Jewish problem, Europe itself could no longer pretend to be liberal, rational, or just. This leads one to think that had they been able to save themselves, the European Jews might have saved liberalism too.

HERE, then, is the rub: Zionism was a movement not of pure but of tempered optimism. From its birth in troubled secular Europe, it required an acknowledgment of the destructive as well as the creative impulses of modern society, of the hateful as well as the benevolent impulses of human beings. This is where it ran into trouble at the start, and where it flounders still. Those really infected by hatred cannot confront their own base prejudice, while those who dream of a benign world order do not want to face the daily manifestation of malice and evil. Like Herzl before them the defenders of the state of Israel today who insist on the rightful place of the Jews in the world are forced into perpetual confrontation with those who deny them that place. Jewish self-affirmation has never been an exercise for the weak, and in this respect, at least, the modern Jew who fights for Israel has something in common with his ancestor who refused to abandon his God.

Even posthumously—I mean not after Herzl's death but after the destruction of European Jewry—there are still liberals who resent the realism that Jewish nationhood introduces into the modern world. Some object, on philosophical or psychological grounds, to admitting the fact of so much hatred, while others resent the effort required in standing up for the Jews. One may feel sorry for their timid souls, except that any pity wasted on them may result in the real death of Jewish children, sooner or later.

Aggression against the Jews *can* become an occasion for liberal affirmation (liberal in the older sense, I mean), but only if one is prepared to fight for the legitimate rights of the Jews—as Jews, as imperfect Jews. This, of course, our moral strutters are least inclined to do.

You and I have often discussed the concept of normalcy or normalization that has plagued Zionist thinkers and modern Jews. *Rome and Jerusalem* finally consolidated my inchoate discomfort with the word "normalization."

As a political term, "*normalization*" points in the wrong direction. The hope of political Zionism was not for Jewish conformity to the standards of other nations, because the very basis of the Zionist enterprise was to conserve and renew Jewish national distinctiveness, in one form or another. Politically, Zionism aimed rather for *unexceptionalism*, a concept which puts the emphasis not on the adjustment of the Jews to the norms of other nations, but on the adjustment of other nations to the normative existence of the Jews. Insofar as certain international standards of the law, diplomacy, reciprocity, and convention do exist among nations, they were to apply, unexceptionally, to the Jewish nation in the Jewish state.

The emergence of nation-states in the 19th and

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20th centuries necessitated the creation of a Jewish homeland to save the Jewish remnant from European barbarism. The same process, rampant now throughout the East and West alike, required the rescue of Jews from Arab lands no less than from continental Europe. For the Jews to insist on their right to an unexceptional existence in the community of nations, to the unexceptional legitimacy of their polity, and to their unexceptional treatment as human beings, is to discharge an obligation to the world as much as to themselves—at least if one wishes to continue believing in the world as a habitable human sphere. Faith in the world is predicated on the world's ability to accept the political unexceptionalism of the Jews, who will have been a light unto the nations when they are no longer required as a scapegoat.

As for the substance of Jewish nationhood, the extent and definition of Jewish normalcy, that is a matter for the Jews to decide. Some nations have refined themselves, and others have befouled themselves, and it isn't clear which we ought to consider the norm. But the content of the national existence is independent of its legitimacy, which is all that Zionism sought to guarantee. The scandal of Arab rejectionism forty years after the creation of the state of Israel is great enough; the scandal of Jews who accept this outrage as a sign of their own moral election is an affront not only to Jewish life but to any moral life worth living.

In the spirit of Sholem Aleichem, let's now turn to more cheerful subjects. What's the current rate of inflation in Israel, and have you figured out the deductions on your first pay check?

WITH LOVE—

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Inventing the Homosexual

Marjorie Rosenberg

FROM antiquity until perhaps a century ago, choice was presumed to govern sexual behavior. But in the late 19th century, with a burgeoning medical science as midwife, a new kind of creature was born—"the homosexual"—his entire identity based on his sexual preference. Science offered the possibility of either constitutional or psychological causes for his existence, starting a quarrel which left him always a passive victim. Either physiological factors, whose nature and reality have never been established, or early familial relationships, in which the psychoanalytic vendetta against mothers figured prominently, were posited as the cause for what came to be viewed as uncontrollable by the conscious will.

Under the aegis of religion one had been free to choose, and, if one were male, to choose anew on each occasion, how to conduct one's sexual life. With the reign of an "objective" science, men were committed to categories, to partial aspects of themselves, and not just by their behavior. Dreams, fantasies, wayward thoughts, casual childhood experimentation, took on, through psychoanalytic theory, awful consequences in terms of this unsought new identity. As 19th-century physics rendered solid objects into millions of dancing electrons, and Impressionist painters broke up a landscape into particles of refracted light and shade, so Freud—equally atomistic—reduced his patients to the details of their sexual histories.

Sensational as was Freud's elaboration of his theories of sexual causation, their ultimate acceptance rested on the larger victory of scientific determinism over the belief in free will which had endured through both pagan and Christian times. The new scientific creation of "the homosexual," in absolving its object from the possibility of choice, encouraged the development of the identity it professed to find in nature. But the centuries-old view of sexual behavior as a manifestation of moral choice was not to be overturned at a blow, and the new diagnostic entity was subjected, within and without the medical profession, to traditional habits of thought.

Bowing to the omniscience of scientific psychiatry, the homosexual had exchanged part of his behavior, or an occasional pleasure, for a total identity, only to be battered by a society that was not yet ready to integrate the new personage he represented. A psychology of victimization was the outcome for those who accepted a social role beset by such conflicting attitudes, and this was visible in the passivity and effeminacy that characterized male homosexuality in Western countries from the 19th century until the 1960's. It must, however, be remembered that in much of the rest of the world occasional, or even frequent, homoerotic behavior was no more a condition of identity than it had been in ancient Greece, and that condemnation of such activity rested on the nature of the act, not its object. But for psychoanalysis and Western psychiatry, the quality of homosexual behavior was largely obliterated in the focus on the choice of object.

The imperatives of scientific classification having swallowed up their individuality, those who engaged in homosexual activity began to perceive themselves as constituting a group—an oppressed minority wthin the larger society. With the publication of the first Kinsey report in 1948 and a statistical representation of their numbers which, by the mere act of quantification, achieved the authority once reserved for Holy Writ, the glimmerings of a conception of group power began to emerge. That 37 percent of the male sample questioned admitted to physical contact to the point of orgasm with another male at least once between adolescence and old age was heralded, not as the reasonable basis for questioning the determinism of sexual categories which it represented, but rather as a justification for those categories. The 10 percent of American males who had indulged in more or less exclusively homosexual behavior for at least three years were seized upon to promote a sense of group membership; no matter if their experience had been only in adolescence or had been discontinued. Kinsey himself denied the existence of "the homosexual," but the evolution which would lead to the assault by homosexuals on the American Psychiatric Association in 1970 had begun

RALLYING to the diagnostic label which had obscured their differences and intensified their problems, those who engaged in

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homosexuality were joined by an increasing number of social scientists who began to take up their cause in the late 1950's. The purpose of these academic representatives of a value-free science was to establish the essential normality of the homosexual and thus to bury the disapproval which Freudian theory had given to a diagnosis connoting arrested development. Happy to challenge psychoanalysis, which was largely contemptuous of their mathematical models and their emphasis on quantification, the social scientists brought to the struggle their own doctrine, which had come to be a relativism condemnatory of the condemnation of deviance. The counterattack was launched in the person of a benevolent psychologist by the name of Evelyn Hooker, who had been urged by homosexuals to undertake research questioning negative assumptions about them.

Hooker's choice of a homosexual research sample, whose adjustment she sought to compare with a heterosexual group, was not a random one, having been drawn from among homosexual organizations extremely anxious to provide their most admirable members. Further preventing any deviation from this intention, she removed from the sample anyone who struck her as obviously pathological. Additional limitations to the validity of the research were introduced through her criteria of adjustment, performance on the Rorschach and two other projective tests. These tests are generally used to augment rather than to make a diagnosis and are not intended to be used by examiners who have not seen the subject. The Rorschach, in particular, has been shown to be an extremely unreliable tool, varying as much with the personality of the tester as with that of the subject, and frequently unable to distinguish men from women, let alone homosexuals from heterosexuals. Thus it was that Hooker produced the results desired by her homosexual patrons: the judges found little difference in the two samples.

Acclaimed not for what she had actually done, but for what many wished to believe she had done, Hooker went on from this beginning to become an authority on homosexuality, requested to write the entry on the subject for the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. At the end of the 1960's she was chosen to lead the National Institute of Mental Health Task Force on Homosexuality.

Hooker rejected the conception of homosexuality as a unitary clinical entity, but she was encouraging of the growth of a homosexual movement on the grounds, inseparable from the dogmas of scientific determinism, of the victimization of its members by society. But the emphasis on the homosexual as victim led, circularly, back to the sinking of all differences within the group, differences which Kinsey and Hooker stressed. Their conviction of these differences did not take hold; it was complicated. What gained increasing acceptance was their view of the homosexual as victim, his sexual inclinations natural, the superimposition of problems a result of society's prohibitions and punishments. From a belief largely confined to homosexuals themselves, this conception gained increasing currency from the late 1950's to the present, until it is now held among a large segment of the educated to be as sacred as was the principle of moral choice a century ago.

The zealousness with which the defense of homosexuality was taken up by many social scientists is illustrated by the career of Laud Humphreys, for ten years an Episcopalian minister, converted in the 1960's to a graduate student in sociology. In the latter incarnation he devoted two years of his life to observing males committing fellatio on one another in public toilets—entering as strangers, coming together without speech. This was the subject of his doctoral dissertation, later published as a book called *The Tearoom Trade: Anonymous Sex in Public Places*, the "tearoom" of the title referring to public lavatories. With a carefully worked-out research design, subject to none of the bias which negated the validity of Hooker's study, Humphreys's work manifested only the gross distortions inherent in the nature of such research. Thus, after tracking down many of the men he had observed and presenting himself as an interviewer for a social-health survey, he was ready to accept as revelation of character the answers given to the questionnaire, or, in the case of the eight intensive interviews he conducted, the voluntary self-evaluations he had solicited. Humphreys's conclusions:

> I have no moral or intellectual objection to what goes on in the "tearooms," and only a mild aesthetic one. I do have a moral objection to the way in which society reacts to those who take part in that action.

Whether the gentlemen who frequented the public toilets for sex with strangers might without this hobby have had richer relationships with wives, children, or friends; whether they might have developed more valuable capacities with a different employment of their time, are not questions which interested Humphreys. Recognizing, along with Hooker and other researchers of the sociology of deviance school, the great range of homosexual behavior, he joined them in attempting to justify it all. With a wish to correct the unitary diagnosis of psychoanalysis, the sociologists of deviance compounded it. As the writer Arno Karlen has said, "After criticizing psychiatrists for lumping all homosexuals together and calling them sick, they tend themselves to lump all homosexuals together and call them healthy, or victims of society." Laud Humphreys went on to do more research on homosexuality, with the hope of influencing public policy.

The practitioners of psychoanalysis and the psychiatrists trained in Freudian theory persisted, however, in retaining a hierarchy of values for sexual behavior, and it was to this

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persistence that homosexuals began to address themselves. Their group identity materially strengthened by support from the social sciences, they borrowed their strategy for exerting pressure from the civil-rights movement. The implied equation between homosexual behavior and race revealed the degree to which the former was now successfully entrenched in the area beyond choice.

Picketing, leafleting, and disruption of lectures in which mental-health professionals represented homosexuality as a less than optimal adjustment had begun around 1968. The demands had shifted from tolerance to approval: the condemnation of psychiatry had increased to the point where all therapy voluntarily undertaken by homosexuals seeking change of sexual orientation was denounced as, in fact, enforced by society. Benefiting from the pervasive revolt against authority in which a large portion of the educated young were involved, as well as from the success of the civil-rights movement, homosexuals abandoned discussion and self-inquiry for a determination of truth which was to be arrived at through threats, denunciation, and physical interference with disapproved professional meetings. Unlike blacks, who were primarily addressing behavior directed against them, homosexuals were attempting to alter a theoretical system. Their success was considerable.

From 1970 until 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) became a major focus for the homosexual movement, and Ronald Bayer has provided (in *Homosexuality and American Society*) a detailed account of what transpired. Violent and insulting as was the behavior directed against certain psychiatrists at the 1970 meeting in San Francisco, the calculated use of rage and invective was escalated for the 1971 convention in Washington. The acceptance by the APA of a panel of homosexual speakers at this convention was thought by activists to be a dangerous "institutionalization of protest" necessitating the addition of planned disruption. A homosexual leader of those who stormed the Convocation of Fellows described himself as declaring war on psychiatry, initiating a mood of intimidation which, from that point, pervaded the meetings. Forged credentials permitted homosexuals to move freely through the convention areas. Near the close of the convention, movement leaders conveyed their demands for a deletion of homosexuality from the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM II)*; and it was this demand which now became the basis of contention.

That homosexuals had been able to achieve an equation between the importance of their activity in behalf of their sexual desires and that of the black civil-rights movement and the antiwar protest was an exemplification of the *Zeitgeist*. The response of many psychiatrists showed them willing to consider the liberation of homosexual behavior from societal restraints as a political cause worthy of their energetic espousal. Others were frightened by rageful denunciation and sought an accommodation with their critics. In early 1972 homosexuals first presented their demands formally to the Nomenclature Committee of the APA; and by the end of 1973 the board of trustees of that organization had voted to remove homosexuality from the *Manual of Psychiatric Disorders*. It was to be replaced with the classification "sexual orientation disturbance," which, it was explained, included only those who were disturbed by or wished to change their sexual orientation. It was specified that "This diagnostic category is distinguished from homosexuality, which by itself, does not necessarily constitute a psychiatric disorder."

It was astounding to many psychiatrists that subjective distress was to provide the standard by which to determine the presence or absence of psychopathology in homosexuals, the absence of such distress being often characteristic of the most severe disorder. The existence of manic, paranoid, or schizophrenic psychosis is not commonly indicated by a subjective feeling of disturbed functioning or a desire for personal change, just as the alcoholic or drug addict will often not admit to, or attempt to remedy, his condition.

The psychiatric concept of homosexuality had been an integral part of a theoretical system elaborated throughout this century; it was overturned in a two-year period by committees of the American Psychiatric Association responding to a general political climate and to specific political manipulation and intimidation. But this subjection of the diagnostic category of homosexuality to approval by vote in various committees was felt by many psychiatrists to be such a violation of the standards of scientific inquiry as to call for some form of redress. The solution adopted was submission of the issue to the entire membership of the APA. Though partaking of the evil it was designed to correct—making a democratic vote the arbiter of scientific truth—this plan, it was argued, would at least reflect the collective scientific wisdom of the profession, in contrast to the more political orientation of the Association's leadership.

But the referendum was to be no more an indication of scientific wisdom *or* of democratic decision-making than had been the previous votes on the diagnosis of homosexuality. Homosexual activists immediately intervened in the process, suggesting strategy to their friends in the APA. What they produced was a statement urging support from the general membership for the deletion of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder—a statement which avoided the substance of the conflict in a plea for organizational unity. It was to potential embarrassment in voting down a decision by the board of trustees that they appealed; and it was the National Gay Task Force which orchestrated the signing of the statement by officers and candidates for office of the APA, purchased the

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necessary address labels from the Association, and underwrote the full cost of the mailing to the psychiatrists representing the organization's membership. Their strategy was successful: 58 percent of the respondents supported the decision of the board of trustees.

BENEATH this narrow victory, based primarily on organizational considerations, there remained a deep conflict over the issue within psychiatry and a confusion over the principles which ought to govern diagnostic nomenclature. To the general public, however, what had been communicated was the approval of homosexuality, undifferentiated as to the nature of its expression. Other voices within the profession, such as that of Abram Kardiner, a senior figure who had pioneered in the effort to merge the insights of psychoanalysis and anthropology, were not heard. He had written to the editors of *Psychiatric News*:

> Those who reinforce the disintegrative elements in our society will get no thanks from future generations. The family becomes the ultimate victim of homosexuality, a result which any society can tolerate only within certain limits.
>
> If the American Psychiatric Association endorses one of the symptoms of social distress as a normal phenomenon, it demonstrates to the public its ignorance of social dynamics, of the relation of personal maladaptation to social disharmony, and thereby acquires a responsibility for aggravating the already existing chaos.

Voices such as Kardiner's, representing psychiatry or academic research, have been increasingly silent for the last twenty years. The dominant note was struck by the long awaited Kinsey Institute study, *Homosexualities*, published in 1978, based on data collected in 1970. The New York *Times* story on the report was headlined, "Study Finds Some Homosexuals Are Happier Than Heterosexuals," a message often reiterated by the authors, who added better adjustment to happiness in their comparison.

That happiness or social adjustment can be divined from answers to a questionnaire administered by a stranger is an illusion requiring a leap of faith that many of us cannot make in company with our credulous social scientists. But even if one were counted among the faithful, it would still be true that the report's happy homosexuals constituted slightly less than 10 percent of their male sample, *and* represented the group whose sexual behavior most closely imitated that of heterosexual couples. This 10 percent was then consistently compared with the entire heterosexual sample. Moreover, the small proportion of "well-adjusted" homosexuals can be discovered only in the statistical tables; its size is not revealed in the text.

The propagandistic zeal of the study is manifested in what is ignored or treated summarily as well as through what is emphasized, in the frequent disparity between the statistical findings and the written text, and in the minimizing language with which homosexual problems are treated. Thus, the 528-question interview schedule did not inquire into drinking or drug use among homosexuals. Reference to venereal disease in males is confined to a one-sentence statement—a statement which in itself shows both the seriousness of the problem and the authors' refusal to face it. They comment: "About two-thirds of the males in each race had at some time contracted a venereal disease as a result of homosexual sex, but of these, most had had it only once or twice."

Implicit in this rapid dismissal is the denial of the connection between individual sexual behavior and its social consequences—a denial which fostered the conditions for the AIDS epidemic. Promiscuity is fundamental to the connection, but the authors of the study, having enlisted under the banner of sexual liberation, had no standards for distinguishing excess, and were thus prepared to ignore or justify it wherever encountered.

Finding that almost half of their white homosexual male sample reported at least 500 different sexual partners, and this at the average age of thirty-seven, the authors explain this remarkable degree of promiscuity as partly inherent in the nature of the male—without, however, making any comparison to heterosexuals. They go on to suggest, as another causal factor, the alleged circumstance that society provides homosexual men with "little or no opportunity to meet on anything but a sexual basis." What prevents them from meeting on a non-sexual basis is extremely difficult to comprehend, but the nature of the barriers is not elucidated.

Homosexual bathhouses are discussed in the text in terms of how often subjects had *not* gone to them, a further indication of the tone of the research. The statistical tables reveal, however, that one-third of the homosexual men used the baths regularly and 62 percent sometimes participated in this commercial setting for anonymous sex. Reporting on male homosexual "cruising"—the search for sex with strangers, which they found to be characteristic of almost their entire sample—the authors remark that most of this activity took place in "such relatively safe settings as the gay bar or bath" and that often the respondents "spent at least several hours with their partners." But the safety of sexual contacts made in homosexual baths or bars could consist only in freedom from the one threat perceptible to the authors—that of social disapproval or interference. Distinguishing no evil but from outside restrictions or harassments, they could celebrate transient sexual encounters where companionship was actually sustained for several hours.

A distinct crusading fervor suffuses the pages of *Homosexualities*, its source, the commonly held attitude of contemporary social scientists that moral and communal requirements impose an un-

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justifiable burden on homosexual behavior. Alan Bell, co-author and research director of the study, was, like Laud Humphreys, the author of *The Tea Room Trade*, an Episcopalian minister before taking up social science and the cause of the homosexual. Both men converted their own moral zeal into an attack on social standards, implying that with the withering away of external restraints and disapproval, the happy, healthy homosexual would emerge—the innocent child of nature whom society's prohibitions had deformed.

It should be noted that female homosexuality, as portrayed in the Kinsey Institute study, is a very different phenomenon from the male version, and that this difference is reflected by virtually all writers on the subject. Less common in the population by one-third to one-half than homosexual males, according to the original Kinsey reports, lesbians are also markedly less promiscuous, less public in their identification and in their sexual behavior. The majority of the study's lesbians had fewer than ten partners in the course of their homosexual careers as against 500 partners for the males; less than 20 percent had ever engaged in what could be termed "cruising" (and this at private parties or lesbian bars) in contrast to the almost universal practice of this activity by homosexual males and the variety of public places—lavatories, movie theaters, bathhouses, streets, and parks—in which the males pursued sex. Not surprisingly, then, none of the white lesbians and only one of the black lesbians had ever had a venereal disease, as compared with the two-thirds figure for the male sample.

Appearing to magnify often-noted emotional differences between the sexes, lesbians and homosexual men show a wide divergence in desire for monogamy and intimacy and in the tendency to separate sex from affection. Dennis Altman, an academic homosexual and apologist, in discussing "the birth of a gay culture," comments on other differences, both of sensibility and social activity. Lesbian writers, he says, seem "more attracted to fantasy and the invention of utopian models; gay men to direct assertion of sexuality"; and "while gay men are more likely to develop the sort of commercial enterprises associated with the sauna/disco culture, lesbians have been more attracted to self-conscious counter-institutions . . . [which] involve a greater degree of communal intellectual and artistic activity."

WHATEVER the basis for their different approach to homosexuality, lesbians have impinged far less on the general society than have homosexual men who, over the last thirty years, have created a male homosexual culture equaled in its openness and visibility only by that of classical Greece. No other parallels are to be found. But the strict Greek conventions as to the propriety of particular sexual acts had no part in a modern homosexual culture engaged in throwing off all restraints. Much of its physical expression would have repelled the Greeks as absurd or contemptible, while the compulsive and mechanical quest for sexual encounters with strangers would have been incomprehensible to a classical society which extolled self-mastery and abhorred anonymity.

Social tolerance of promiscuity produced its increase; the abandonment of sexual prohibitions encouraged greater sensation-seeking. Thus, elaborations of coprophiliac interest in the form of anilingus and the insertion of fingers or the entire hand into the anus of one's partner became not uncommon. The passive role in anal intercourse, relegated by the Greeks to powerless women or slaves, was indulged in so promiscuously as to introduce and disseminate the AIDS virus. Researchers point out that the rectum is not designed to stretch for the accommodation of sexual intercourse, let alone the social invention of "fist fucking." To the Greeks it would have been inconceivable that free men could choose to engage in such activities.

With the new sexual liberation, justifications for sadomasochism were increasingly advanced in the homosexual community. Borrowing the Freudian view of sex as the basic human motivation and the unconscious as a repository of powerful forces which are best brought to consciousness and expressed, apologists had little difficulty. Thus, Altman reports claims for the therapeutic social role of sadomasochism and the novelist John Rechy speaks of justifications which invert reality to describe sadomasochism as a "new dimension of love" and a "new sensation of pleasure." Moreover, it is described as imitating and thus respecting nature. The prevalence of homosexual sadomasochism, perhaps the symbol of a perverse search for structure, which society has been busily engaged in removing, is lamented, not by any of the social scientists referred to, but by John Rechy, a self-proclaimed street hustler and announced participant in 7,000 homosexual encounters.

Paradoxically, the rejection of internal and external restraints celebrated by a homosexual culture defined only by sex has ended for many in acting out the role of slave. But the real slavery is not confined to those who participate in such bizarre theatrics. Xenophon illustrates the point when he quotes Socrates as asking, "Do you think the man is free who is ruled by bodily pleasures and is unable to do what is best because of them?" Greek thought took cognizance of what contemporary culture has forgotten: to be free in relation to one's pleasures necessitates the avoidance of slavery to one's appetites.

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A Fateful Intellectual Friendship

Edward Rothstein

The Jewish mystic lives and acts in perpetual rebellion against a world with which he strives with all his zeal to be at peace.
—GERSHOM SCHOLEM

IN HIS HOUSE in Jerusalem, Gershom Scholem, the great historian of Jewish mysticism, kept a painting, Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. It was willed to him by a friend of his youth, the German critic Walter Benjamin. This curious work of art, with its schematic portrait of a startled angel, hair of tangled scrolls, arms spread seemingly in both recoil and benediction, was an icon of one of the more unusual friendships in 20th-century intellectual history.

The two men referred often in their letters to this heavenly figure. It was, for each of them, a most cherished possession. And this angel, in all its ambiguousness, also seems in retrospect to represent the larger issues of debate and discussion between these two German-Jewish thinkers in the twilight days of Germany before the advent of Hitler—a debate and discussion over just what sort of redemption could be offered to a fallen world. At a time when fascism was on the horizon and Marxism so youthfully full of great hopes, the arguments of Benjamin and Scholem ranged over the promises and dangers of religious and political idealism. They differed over the origins of the modern world itself, over how to explain its debased material and spiritual life, and over what hopes could be held out in the face of imminent catastrophe.

These issues are no less urgent now than they were in the 1920's and 30's; in the intervening years ideologies of political and religious redemption have, if anything, grown in number and strength. The Scholem-Benjamin friendship is thus of peculiar pertinence today. Yet their friendship has been curiously slighted in the vast exegetical industry that has grown about Benjamin in recent decades; it has hardly even been noticed in the years since Scholem's death in 1982.

SCHOLEM (1897-1982) and Benjamin (1892-1940) came at these great questions obliquely, and through seemingly divergent paths. Scholem was a historian whose studies of Jewish mystical teachings restored to consciousness a religious tradition that had been dismissed or derogated by generations of historians and religious authorities alike. His classic work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), was supplemented by numerous essays and books on messianism, on Jewish politics, on the nature of revelation, on the metaphors of mystical texts, and on the neglected career and influence of the false messiah of the 17th century, Sabbatai Zevi.

Benjamin was a literary critic about whom more has been written than he himself ever published. Aside from an early dissertation on German Romantic art criticism, he completed only one book, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928), in which he pondered the significance of the Baroque stage play known as the *Trauerspiel*. Everything else is aphorism, excerpt, and essay—dealing with figures like Goethe, Kafka, Karl Kraus; meditating on Paris and Moscow; playing with ideas about the origins of language and the end of history.

Given these disparate interests, there would hardly seem to be any common ground on which Scholem and Benjamin could meet. But, as Scholem writes, there were several things he had in common with Benjamin: "A resoluteness in pursuing our intellectual goals, rejection of our environment—which was basically the German-Jewish assimilated middle class—and a positive attitude toward metaphysics."

Rejection of the environment was perhaps the most fundamental fact for each. Benjamin's father sold antiques and Oriental rugs; Scholem's was a printer. For both upper-middle-class families, Judaism was a barely tolerated heritage, founded on a vague respect for ancestors. Both families celebrated Christmas, though neither would have been welcome at their neighbors' celebrations.

Scholem's rejection of this environment took the form of an involvement with Judaism; indeed, he was eventually banished from his father's house precisely because of his Jewish interests. But this same rebellious involvement with Judaism was decisive both for his friendship with Benjamin and for their later—and often very severe—disagreements. At the time of their first meeting in 1915—Scholem was just over seventeen, Benjamin

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was twenty-three—Scholem already possessed an "insatiable mania" for Jewish learning. He studied Hebrew ten to fifteen hours a week, and argued for Zionism as a spiritual rebirth of the Jewish people. Greatly impressed, Benjamin said that if he ever developed a philosophy of his own, "it somehow will be a philosophy of Judaism." Under the influence of Scholem (who wanted him to become nothing less than a successor to Rashi, the great 11th-century biblical commentator), Benjamin grew interested in the modern Hebrew writer S.Y. Agnon, learned about the imagery of the kabbalah, and kept planning to study Hebrew.

Scholem in those early years believed that he and Benjamin were involved in a common project. But unlike Benjamin, for Scholem, Jewish preoccupations became paramount. He himself was religiously unobservant but devoted to Jewish tradition, attentive to the past but possessed by a dream of spiritual renewal, scholarly in temper but touched by a taste for the extreme. His focus on the neglected mystical history of Judaism in part represented an attack on an entire era in which assimilated German-Jewish scholars of the 19th century had treated Judaism less as a living religion than as a subject for post-mortem research. But his aim was not just scholarly; he wanted to give Judaism a different foundation, rejecting "bourgeois efforts" at understanding "so unbourgeois a phenomenon as Judaism." He became fascinated too with the Jewish underworld in Germany, the criminal class that repudiated bourgeois Jewish society in a different way.

In fact Scholem saw no future for the German-Jewish bourgeoisie. He believed it was doubly doomed—from within because it denied the force of Judaism, and from without because of the hostility of German culture. The only hope was to make the journey "From Berlin to Jerusalem" (as he would put it many years later in the title of his first volume of memoirs).

Although in 1923 he himself took that journey, without ever looking back, Benjamin never did. Apart from two brief meetings in Europe, the friendship continued over the next seventeen years, until Benjamin's death, only in correspondence. During all those years Scholem never ceased urging his friend to study Hebrew and come to Palestine, even though he knew early on that the differences between them were fundamental, and in particular that Benjamin's devotion to the spiritual was (as he put it) "like that of a scribe cast out into another world, who has set off in search of his 'scripture' "—a quest Scholem himself never had to engage in.

Then in the mid-20's a new factor entered the picture. Benjamin fell in love with Asja Lacis, a "Russian revolutionary" who first introduced him to Marxist thought. It was there, not in Judaism, that Benjamin eventually found his "scripture." On this issue Scholem's judgment was unambiguous. In 1923, Benjamin had seemed to him surefooted, a man "who unswervingly followed his genius"; four years later, after meeting him on a trip to Paris, Scholem found that Benjamin's previously "harmonious view of the world was shattered and in disrepair."

In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Scholem went on trying to convince Benjamin to come to the newly founded Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he himself had found an intellectual home. But to no avail. Now he had to contend not only with Benjamin's indecisiveness and confusion but with Asja Lacis, who boasted of how she prevented his leaving; and then, after 1929, there was the additional obstacle of Benjamin's new friend, the poet and playwright (and Communist) Bertolt Brecht, who exercised an influence on Benjamin at least as powerful as Scholem's. In attempting to combat *this* "baleful and in some respects disastrous" influence, Scholem wrote a series of very harsh letters to Benjamin about the direction his work was taking. So harsh, indeed, were these letters that, though Scholem was in Europe in 1932 for several months, Benjamin avoided a meeting.

For Scholem the story of his friendship with Benjamin is the story of a struggle for Benjamin's life and soul. As Scholem saw it, Benjamin was hiding the most authentic aspect of his thinking—his Jewish spiritual orientation—and choosing to disguise it in the vocabulary and manners of Marxist materialism and Communist politics; he was engaged in a "singularly intensive kind of self-deception"; he was damaging his position as the most important critical writer of his generation by distorting the "morality" of his insights; he was producing out of this "sham" position a body of writing that was "the work of an adventurer, purveyor of ambiguities, and a cardsharper"; he was becoming yet another victim of "the confusion between religion and politics."

Finally, Scholem charged Benjamin with a failure to recognize that there was no future for the Jews in Germany. In this he was, at the very least, prescient. His own brother Werner, for example, was a Communist and then a member of the Reichstag; he was to die in Hitler's camps. Asja Lacis was to be imprisoned in the Soviet Union in one of Stalin's camps. And as for Benjamin himself, in 1940, unable finally to escape the Nazis by crossing the border from occupied France into Spain (and thence to the United States), he was to commit the act of suicide he had contemplated at least twice before, and alluded to again and again in his writings.

Given all this, it is surprising indeed that Scholem's challenges have often been treated as secondary, even inconsequential, in much of the English-language scholarship on Benjamin that has accumulated during the past few decades. Another of Benjamin's friends, Hannah Arendt, in an elegant introduction to the collection of his essays she edited under the title *Illuminations*

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(1968), mentions but does not address these conflicts. Richard Wolin, in the most dutiful, dense, and intelligent study of Benjamin's thought yet published in English—*Walter Benjamin: An Esthetic of Redemption* (1982)—begins to address the kinds of issues raised by Scholem, but devotes more sustained attention to the aesthetic arguments Benjamin had with the philosopher Theodor Adorno, a debate which centered on Marxist theory. Similarly with other recent books. For example, the British critic Terry Eagleton is such an advocate of Benjamin's Marxism that his book is called *Walter Benjamin: Or Toward a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981) and pays little attention to Benjamin's Jewishness or to Scholem's perspective.

Yet the truth is that Benjamin cannot be understood without reference to Scholem (who corresponded extensively with Benjamin, collaborated with Adorno in editing Benjamin's collected papers, and wrote about Benjamin in memoirs and essays).* Nor, to a lesser extent, can Scholem be understood without reference to Benjamin. For despite all their disagreements, it was Benjamin—"friend of a lifetime whose genius united the insight of the Metaphysician, the interpretive power of the Critic, and the erudition of the Scholar"—to whom Scholem dedicated his masterwork, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.*

II

> Woe to the sinners who look upon the Torah as simply tales pertaining to things of the world, seeing thus only the outer garment. . . . That garment is made up of the tales and stories; but we, we are bound to penetrate beyond.
>
> —THE ZOHAR

THE problem is that Benjamin himself is nearly an impenetrable thinker. And this was, as they say, no accident. Benjamin's "interpretive power" as a critic was drawn to what might be called the "fallen" condition of the world, and in particular, the fallen nature of language. "Every truth has its home, its ancestral palace, in language," he wrote to Hugo von Hofmannsthal. He suggested elsewhere that this ancestral palace was a pure language, existing before the expulsion from Paradise, and it provided, in his quasi-mystical connotation, knowledge itself: "The paradisiac language of man must have been one of perfect knowledge." But the Fall sundered the metaphysical link between name and knowledge. Language in a fallen world became merely a system of signs, arbitrary, degenerate.

These ideas, vague as they were, served as the foundation of a distinction that was to be crucial to Benjamin's thinking—between symbol and allegory. Though the distinction haunted Romantic criticism, Benjamin gave it a unique and sometimes baffling spin.

A symbol, he argued, is instantly linked to its meaning—the cross to Christ, for example. The symbol is immediate, like a flash of lightning: it has an almost transcendental force, like divine revelation. Such was language before the Fall. But allegory is a quite different form of expression. It is a style tied not to nature and to revelation—as is the symbol—but to the accidents of history. Allegory is a way in which, in the fallen world, we tell tales. It presumes a loss, an absence of direction, and hence it demands exegesis.

We are accustomed to thinking of allegorical tales as very determined, indeed overdetermined; each object stands for some other object or concept, and the events in the tale, when properly translated, illustrate a lesson. For Benjamin, however, allegory has nothing necessary or predetermined about it; the coherence is something that is placed upon it in the act of interpretation, and in that interpretation everything must be spelled out.

In an allegory, Benjamin wrote, "any object, any relationship, can mean absolutely anything else." The allegory demands an allegorist—the critic, the reader—who transforms as he translates. In his view, even language itself—arbitrary signs which hide ruins of ancient truth—is an allegory, having lost its ancestral link with knowledge. Allegory is thus a mode of expression in need of what Benjamin calls "redemption."

These ideas dovetailed with the analyses of Jewish mystical language that Scholem was developing. According to Scholem, the mystic, unlike the philosopher, "refrains from destroying the living tissue of religious narrative by allegorizing it." The mystic, that is, does not treat a tale in a holy text as if it were simply an arbitrary story, a message that could do as well in one form as another. The mode of understanding for the Jewish mystic, Scholem wrote, is "symbolical" (in exactly Benjamin's sense of the term). For the mystic, language has the sort of significance that Benjamin ascribed to it before the Fall; it was "mimetic," to use another of Benjamin's terms. Thus, for example, the Hebrew word for God could itself be contemplated to understand something of His Being.

This symbolic nature of Jewish mystical language also sheds light on what Benjamin meant by "redemption." His project as a critic was a self-proclaimed effort to see through the accidents and arbitrariness of allegory, and to find his way back to the symbolic powers of language. For Benjamin's persistent view was that the critic, as spectator, could hasten a sort of redemption, just as some mystics claimed to be able to do, by looking at the "truth" which lay underneath the chaos of appearances.

The trouble was that between the Edenic past and the messianic future lay an earthly present

* Scholem's memoir of Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, was brought out in this country by the Jewish Publication Society in 1981. A portion of the book appeared in COMMENTARY under the title "My Friend Walter Benjamin" (December 1981).

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that led Benjamin to the brink of despair. His portrait of that present world is to be found obliquely in his *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, written as a qualifying dissertation at Frankfurt University and rejected as beyond comprehension even by German academics. Its obscurity aside, this book shows just how fallen a world Benjamin's messianism was up against.

The book presents Benjamin's interpretation of the German *Trauerspiel*, a form of tragedy which blossomed briefly during the Baroque period and which, according to Benjamin, included not only German dramas (most of which have sunk into oblivion) but also the plays of the Spaniard Pedro Calderón and some works of Shakespeare. The central figure of the *Trauerspiel* is the ruler who is both tyrant and martyr, who wields extravagant power yet is also doomed by indecision. Virtue is of "no significance" in the world of these plays, and even language is fallen. (Thus in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the very meaning of words themselves is thrown into question as Hamlet debates whether or not he can accept the evidence of his father's murder.) By the end of the *Trauerspiel*, the earthly stage on which the ruler futilely and blindly plays his role is piled with bodies and flooded with blood. Resolution occurs only in widespread death; all that is shown at the end is the "hopelessness of the earthly condition."

For Benjamin, writing in the early 1920's, the Baroque *Trauerspiel* offered concrete examples of allegories treating of the nature of fallen man, fallen language, historical catastrophe. He read them as statements about history and its ruins, as if they were prescient pointers to the apocalyptic events of the 20th century. Scholem properly recognized this study as at once highly theological and highly nihilistic, demonstrating an almost religious faith in the power of critical interpretation mixed with an extreme measure of modernist despair. But what is most striking in the mixture is the second component. Indeed, at the time he wrote, the world of history appeared hopeless to Benjamin, following no law but, as in the *Trauerspiel*, a sequence of indecision and catastrophe.

For Benjamin, the "material" power that would redeem the fallen world would have to be found elsewhere. The Jewish mystic had been able to find that power in God's commandments, whose observance, he believed, contributed to the redemption of the entire universe. Benjamin eventually turned to the formulas of Marxism.

III

> Reason is a great instrument of destruction. For construction, something beyond [reason] is required.
>
> —Gershom Scholem

In the early 1920's while finishing his study of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin wrote to Scholem in Jerusalem, saying that he had begun to send out "Communist signals" in his writing and had found an "intensive insight into the relevance of radical Communism." With such a shift, Benjamin could preserve his notion of a mythic Edenic past, along with the notion of a messianic future, but the processes of history would now be given a direction and a sense related to the material forces of society.

Under the influence of this new perspective, Benjamin undertook an analysis—never completed and surviving only in scattered notes and essays—of the origins of modernity in the era of high capitalism as embodied in 19th-century Paris. Following the example of Baudelaire, whose poetry is shown by Benjamin to have an "allegorical" approach to the new urban universe, he proceeds to link together the most disparate aspects of 19th-century urban life.

The world he describes is a world of shocks: the sense of shock walking in the crowds of the city, which is similar to the sense of shock a worker feels at a machine or at the gambling table, which is itself similar to the shock produced by the flood of commodities and by such new inventions as the camera or the match. It is also a world in which the individual is at risk: the detective story develops, with its image of the criminal losing himself in a crowd without a trace; the bourgeois home, in contrast, becomes a refuge from the crowd, honoring in its materials and its furniture the "trace" left by the human body. These shocks, these lost traces, mark a transformation in human consciousness and memory, a reduction in the powers of imagination, the symptoms of modern alienation.

Economic issues are part of all this, but they are almost secondary. Benjamin does not mean, for example, to show in good Marxist fashion that these various phenomena, including Baudelaire's poetical style, are the superstructural results of a transformation in the economic sphere; nor does he consider them metaphorical "signs" of a more fundamental foundation, as in classical Marxist thought, where the structure of a poem might be construed as a model of the conditions of production. Benjamin does pay more and more obeisance to Marxist vocabulary and theory—referring to the masses, the means of production, capitalist labor—but he never makes the point of these allusions clear, preferring instead simply to pile up examples and facts.

The result is a style that is peculiar indeed. By treating the world itself as a phantasmagorical assemblage of ideas and objects, Benjamin seems to be attempting to achieve through criticism (if that is the proper word) the "redemption" of an age, to pass through allegory to symbol. Scholem was unhappy with the results, but so were the Marxist thinkers. Adorno referred to one version of Benjamin's argument as a "wide-eyed presentation of mere facts," using a technique that "is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism." Brecht, for his part, in his journal ridiculed

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Benjamin's ostensible "materialist thinking" as "mysticism mysticism, in a posture opposed to mysticism. It is in such a form that the materialistic concept of history is adopted! It is rather ghastly."

What purpose, then, did Benjamin's adoption of Marxist language and imagery serve? In his newly translated *Moscow Diary* (1926),* where Benjamin speaks only to himself and not to any of his sparring partners of those years, there is no sense of a brilliant Marxist intellectual traveling to the Soviet Union to investigate the state of the revolution. It is instead a bleak personal account of alienation and failure. His few comments on whether or not he should join the Communist party weigh the advantages—having a "solid position" and "guaranteed contact with other people"—against the disadvantages—"adversely affecting one's own work." These are hardly the musings of a serious Marxist theoretician.

So too with his vision of history: "That things 'just go on' is the catastrophe," Benjamin wrote, adding "Strindberg's thought: Hell is not something which lies ahead of us—but this life here." Benjamin himself admitted to Scholem that what Marxism offered in the face of such a vision was a platform on which to stand, from which he could at least make gestures as if he were breaking through the "hopelessness of the earthly condition." The gestures, he explained to Scholem in a letter, were "signs of a shift," discarding an "outmoded disguise" for a new "extreme form." It was as if Benjamin were simply designing a more daring suit of clothing for his metaphysical beliefs.

The difficulty came about when such a purely private ideology of salvation was played out in public, when the comforts of Marxist conclusions became temptations for behavior in this world; the dangers, that is, were the dangers tempting all intellectuals when moving from the world of thought to the world of facts.

Some of Benjamin's later essays betray just such a sudden and uncharacteristic leap into "praxis" —like Hamlet in a moment of confusion stabbing Polonius behind the arras. In "The Author as Producer," for example, read in April 1934 before the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris —a "Communist front," according to Scholem— Benjamin argues that a literary work "can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct" and that correctness is achieved through advancement of "technique." This provides an easy standard indeed, slipping in the need for political *kashrut* while paying homage to the avant-garde. Yet Benjamin adds that an author would, if demonstrating "solidarity with the proletariat," come to be an "engineer who seeks his task in adopting apparatus [i.e., his writing] to the ends of the proletarian revolution." This, however, was hardly Benjamin's own view of the writers he most loved—Proust or Kafka or Kraus—who are very far from being "engineers." Benjamin did not send this essay to Scholem; he guessed what the reaction would be.

Scholem's judgment of Benjamin's relation to Marxism, then, must be taken seriously. It may be too strong to say, as Scholem did, that Benjamin was merely engaging in a "pretended mode of thought." But certainly Scholem was right when he wrote to Benjamin in 1931: "You gain your insights not through strict application of a materialistic method but quite independently of it (at best) or (at worst, as in some writings of the last two years) by playing with the ambiguities and dissonances of the method." Benjamin's response was to acknowledge Scholem's critique: "From such a distance, you have recognized so clearly the great outlines of what is going on here"—and going on not only with Benjamin himself, but with other intellectuals in the twilight of pre-Hitler Germany attracted to salvationary analyses of history.

But if there was no question in Benjamin's mind that his intellectual approach was open to challenge, still, he told Scholem, he required some means of "unambiguous differentiation from the bourgeoisie." This was a sentiment with which Scholem had much sympathy. But the problem, Scholem answered, was "not that you are fighting but that you are fighting in a disguise."

"All right," responded Benjamin. "I am going to extremes. A castaway who drifts on a wreck by climbing to the top of an already crumbling mast. But from there he has a chance to give a signal leading to his rescue."

IV

> Three things come unawares: the messiah, a found article, and a scorpion.
>
> —The Talmud

Unlike Benjamin, Scholem did not cling to a crumbling mast like some allegorical mariner. Rather, he swam from the sinking wreck to what he considered the safety of shore. Scholem's "revolt" against the bourgeoisie involved not only taking a Zionist stand for the spiritual rebirth of the Jews, but showing that the evolution of Jewish mysticism, which the great historian of the Jewish people, Heinrich Graetz, had called a sign of the "general degeneracy of Jewry," was actually its hidden strength. Here Scholem found the very "praxis" which Benjamin was vainly searching for in his Marxist explorations.

If, for example, as Benjamin argued, contemporary language was no longer connected to "being," consisting only of ruins and fragments, and if "progress" was nothing but the accumulation of catastrophe, commodity, and corpses, Scholem's interpretation of the mystical world revealed the

* Translated by Richard Sieburth, Harvard University Press, 1986.

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possibility of a restoration of the primal past through ritual and religious observance.

Scholem saw Judaism developing around two "poles," revelation and tradition. Revelation is something like a pregnant silence: "That which is capable of assuming meaning, which needs interpretation in the medium of language." The mystic, then, is always turning back to tradition in order to give meaning and voice to his experience of revelation. There is a tension in mystical explorations between this conservatism and the new vision arising out of immediate personal experience.

But there is also a "great and dangerous" force which can destroy the tension completely, and that force is messianism. Messianism, Scholem explains, is "the intrusion of a new dimension of the present—redemption—into history, which enters into a problematic relation with tradition." Messianic redemption is an event almost beyond comprehension—it can be understood, in fact, only if it has not yet arrived. "The Bible and the apocalyptic writers know of no progress in history leading to the redemption," Scholem writes. Jewish messianism is a "theory of catastrophe," representing, quite literally, a revolution in which all values and practices are subject to reinterpretation.

SCHOLEM's history of Jewish mysticism reaches a climax in the figure of Sabbatai Zevi, who became the center of a messianic movement throughout Europe in the 17th century. The apocalyptic inversion of the tradition, expected in messianic theory, here became a historical reality.

Sabbatai Zevi was a madman, subject to strange behavior and antinomian acts, who proclaimed himself messiah. Yet he found enthusiastic followers. There were tales of miracles, the Red Sea drying up, the lost Ten Tribes gathering for battle; a new calendar was instituted. But before he could lead the way into the messianic age, he was called before the Sultan in Constantinople and told that he must convert to Islam or be put to death. The "messiah" chose conversion. The result was a shock to perhaps three-quarters of the Jewish population of Europe and the Near East. Some, unable to bear the disappointment, continued to believe in his divine mission. He had, they said, descended into the netherworld in an attempt to free God's holy sparks which had been trapped there. He had to sojourn in alien realms, like Esther in Persia and Moses in Egypt.

For Scholem, the Sabbatean movement, with its praises of Him "Who permits that which is forbidden," was the paradigmatic messianic movement, overturning and inverting the tradition. But the paradox was, according to Scholem, that this messianic movement itself had effects on the lives of the Jewish people that were as profound as if the messiah had indeed arrived. For those who believed, the problem became to "rationalize the abyss" suddenly opened between the fallen state of things and the inner certitude that redemption was imminent. The resultant split in religious consciousness foreshadowed a "crisis of faith which overtook the Jewish people as a whole upon its emergence from its medieval isolation." Out of this crisis of faith, Scholem argued, came the Jewish Enlightenment.

Thus, the shocks and crises of modernity directly linked religious messianism with the idea of secular "progress"—and ultimately, of course, with Marxism. Seen in this light, Scholem's *Sabbatai Zevi* (1957) may be considered a kind of counterpart to Benjamin's early book on the *Trauerspiel*. Both are studies of the Baroque period; both present not just historical analyses, but images of the premodern age as a fallen world—either in the betrayal of faith in Sabbatean messianism, or in the recurring disasters on the stage of the *Trauerspiel*. In both, modern history itself, instead of being grounded in tradition and faith, is marked by excess, and by the arbitrary and the shocking.

Scholem, though he decries and deplores the nihilism and antinomianism, does also find something bracing in the excess and alienation. The Sabbatean movement possessed a national character that paradoxically helped pave the way for Zionism in the 20th century. It marked the entrance of the Jews into secular history. For Scholem, the false messiah at least represented the possibility of historical redemption, if not of spiritual restitution. "What daring labyrinths of the spirit are revealed in this new creed!" Scholem exclaimed in his classic Hebrew essay of 1937, "Redemption Through Sin."* "What yearnings for a regeneration of faith and what disdainful negation of the exile!"

Scholem's interpretation of Sabbateanism is open to criticism. He treats Sabbateanism as a purely "Jewish" phenomenon, declaring all outside influences and social factors irrelevant, and thus gives a narrow vision of just how modernity worked its wiles on the Jews of Europe. His view also presents another problem. The Jewish people entered into modern history, according to Scholem, by discarding both the law of Judaism and its tradition, and redirecting messianic energies to the "idea of eternal progress and the infinite task of humanity perfecting it." Scholem thus paradoxically makes Jewish mysticism an important historical force only in a negative sense. He also partly celebrates the very forces of assimilation and secular radicalism which he simultaneously cautions against.

But Scholem's analysis remains potent. Once the Enlightenment came, the symbolical connection, the link which faith had forged between object and word and ritual, was split; the old

* Published in COMMENTARY, January 1971, under the title "The Holiness of Sin."

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order of the mystics was radically altered. The dangers of messianism then became not only religious but political, and all the more problematic because redemption was now being promised not in some realm which transcended human life, but in the mundane world of flesh and economy. Hence Scholem's warnings about Benjamin's own Marxist ideas, and his sensitive anticipation of what would happen to modern ideas of redemption in the different political arenas of both Germany and the Soviet Union. Scholem, for all his studies of mysticism, was much more of a practical materialist when it came to the forces of history; Benjamin, for all his supposed materialism, was much more the mystic.

V

> My wing is ready for flight, / I would like to turn back. / If I stayed timeless time, / I would have little luck.
>
> —GERSHOM SCHOLEM, "*Gruss vom Angelus*," used as an epigraph in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

DURING the summer of 1933, just after Hitler came to power, Benjamin spent a few months living "on the brink of subsistence" on the island of Ibiza, off the coast of Spain. Possibly suffering from malaria in the August heat, he planned to kill himself. As his intellectual testament, he drafted a cryptic text he called *Agesilaus Santander*, a dream fantasy about the angel in Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*.* The angel, writes Benjamin, is at once heavenly and devilish, masculine and feminine; he fixes his eyes in blessing and threat, and pulls the viewer, determinedly, with him in flight.

The angel returned to Benjamin's mind again in 1940, a few months before his successful suicide at the Spanish border, when he made yet another attempt to define his messianic expectations. The angel depicted by Klee, Benjamin says, would seem to be a herald of the future, but instead he is "looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread." He would like to lift the fallen, to act as messianic agent, to "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed." But he cannot. "A storm is blowing from Paradise," Benjamin writes. "It has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

The storm blows from the past, which is where Paradise is located. All that we in the mundane world call "progress" is just the howling wind blowing from a lost world, carrying the weight and freight of history and calamity. It is just such "progress," Benjamin implies, which must be overcome; it is progress itself which prevents redemption.

For Benjamin, the messianic goal was to destroy the "continuum" of history, by uncovering the illusions of "progress"—the storm which is interfering with the angel's redemptive intentions. We have created this "continuum," not realizing that it is a storm, mistaking it for the angel's work, rather than his nemesis. As a critic, Benjamin would take upon himself the messianic role of viewing history the way a spectator views a *Trauerspiel*, the stage covered with dead bodies, calamity following calamity. In that vision is a hint of redemption, for, as he writes in his study of that dramatic form, "It is precisely visions of the frenzy of destruction, in which all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins, which reveal the limit set upon allegorical contemplation." Death, shown in such plenitude, is not just a sign of desolation and despair; there is something beyond death, another world, of which death is the inverted image. "Ultimately in the death-signs of the Baroque the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem."

Benjamin, that is, posited a Sabbatean victory in the midst of death, an overturning of disaster by immersion in the depths. So too with the accumulated catastrophes ("progress") of history: when seen *as* catastrophes, they point, in Benjamin's final vision, to some transcendent realm. When the storm is seen as a storm, we are able to resist it, and grasp the Angelus. If he, as critic, could but fully articulate the disaster, even celebrate the catastrophe to its full extent, he could point the way toward redemption, behind the angel.

Benjamin could be considered a messianic Surrealist, engaging in what he called, in his essay on Surrealism, "experiments in extreme form." Just such an "experiment" was his own Marxism. Since, as he argued, the profane world and the messianic age are fundamentally irreconcilable and opposed, the task of world politics is, by a method that "must be called nihilism," to make the profane world still more profane, so that the messiah can arrive. In *Agesilaus Santander*, the fantasy he composed on Klee's painting, the incarnation of the angel of history bears a name that is an anagram for *Der Angelus Satanus*, The Angel Satan. The struggle is a Sabbatean one, in which forces of darkness become the means to reach a realm of light.

This Sabbatean vision could not have been unnoticed by Scholem himself. In fact, the most ironic twist of their debate is that Scholem's own task as a historian also involved a destructive element which pointed to a version of redemption.

* This text is discussed by Scholem in "Walter Benjamin and His Angel," reprinted in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (1976).

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At risk for him was the tradition of Judaism itself which had, with the coming of modernity, entered a dark era. Scholem believed in the resurrection of Jewish tradition and in the spiritual future of the Jews, but for him, the first step in such a program was to destroy the barren historiography that hid the ruins of mysticism. Benjamin could actually be referring to Scholem when he writes that "authentic historiography does not select its object carelessly. It does not grasp it, it explodes it from the historical continuum. This destructive element in historiography must be understood as a reaction to a moment of danger which threatens equally the recipient of tradition as well as what is handed down. . . . In authentic historiography the redemptive impulse is as strong as the destructive impulse."

Scholem selected his own "object"—Jewish mysticism, messianism, and finally Sabbateanism—with just such care. His "exploding" of the historical continuum meant a radical reinterpretation not only of past events but of the Judaism of the present. He descended into the Jewish netherworld to rescue the sparks of life that had been buried there by the secular and rational forces of the Enlightenment. It is a peculiar intellectual mysticism one senses in Scholem himself: the historian as keeper of the flame, pointing the way to a renewed spiritual life. It is how Benjamin would have wished to see his own work as a critic.

VI

A storm is blowing from Paradise.
—Walter Benjamin

"We probably contributed our share to each other's development," Scholem wrote of his friendship with Benjamin in *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (1977), "and I would say that I owe him at least as much—on an entirely different plane—as he owed me." When one finally steps back from their friendship, from the similarities and the differences, and attempts to account for it all, both figures, curiously, become more ambiguous.

Benjamin is usually written about in honorific terms, as if the pleasure taken in figuring out what he is saying were proof of its importance. But Benjamin was himself a Hamlet-like figure of the modern age, capable of the most intricate meditations, haunted by spirits, sensing the time out of joint, caught in webs spun by conflicting councillors and court intrigue (Lacis, Brecht, Adorno, Scholem). He tells each of his friends what they want to hear; contemplates suicide again and again ("To be or not to be . . ."); and is caught finally, because of his vacillation, in a literal web of death. He feels the weight of history on his shoulders; he considers means of redemption, both personal and social; he tries on masks in an attempt to break the grip of catastrophe.

Benjamin, in fact, aestheticized the catastrophes he wrote about, turned horrors into surreal images, which was one reason why he was so slow to see what was happening in the real Germany. He treated history itself as an "allegory"—giving it his own meaning, which was lack of meaning; speaking of the "hopelessness of the earthly condition" but relishing his own participation in that hopelessness. Marxism was an assertion of messianism in the face of chaos, spiced with strong Romantic yearnings for the prehistoric Edenic past. He had no vision of where the *Angelus* was heading.

Benjamin's intellectual prestige in recent decades derives in part from these very weaknesses that Scholem attacked. By turning all of the modern world into allegory, including the history leading to it, Benjamin elevated the interpreter over his subject to a radical extent. His work on Baroque drama and on 19th-century Paris was coldly brilliant, but his conclusions may amount to little more than a familiar comment about the alienation and fragmentation of contemporary urban life. Moreover, again and again Benjamin invokes "revolutionary" concerns, without ever once dealing with concrete social issues—the rise of fascism in Germany, the problems of poverty, the development of bourgeois freedom in the 19th century. His is an appealing pose: advanced and Romantic, "aesthetic" and political, bleak and utopian.

This makes Scholem's warning about the confusion between religion and politics all the more poignant, for the programmatic imposition of such metaphysical beliefs on the political realm must come up against that aspect of social life which is least present in Benjamin's thought: the ethical. His concern with redemption, his quest for a "position," his perching on the mast of a sinking ship, were less moral than intellectual or metaphysical activities. There is neither "praxis" nor specificity; all is abstract messianism. And the introduction of messianism into world politics Scholem knew to be dangerous; it posed the threat of nihilistic Sabbateanism—or of totalitarian attempts to control it.

These are the very elements that make the Scholem-Benjamin relationship so pertinent to the contemporary scene. Benjamin's Marxism was admittedly peculiar, but he was drawn to it and used its methods and vocabulary for reasons that resonate with today's more widespread fascination with Marxist criticism and analysis: his peculiarity is actually archetypal. Benjamin's Marxism was a metaphysical move, in which the promised result was personal and intellectual salvation, not political revolution or social transformation. Marxism offered a method of symbolic analysis which complemented his own nihilistic mysticism; it seemed to give his work a crucial role to play in history. Yet it was all no more than an "experiment," because, as Scholem recognized, Marxism for Benjamin was just a theoretical move, disposed of or distorted as needed.

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What made Scholem so passionate was his recognition that while thought-experiments in physics never risk hitting anybody with a falling stone, in the political world such experiments can have concrete effects. Even as Benjamin calmly celebrated the virtues of the "destructive personality," or the engineering duties of writers, there were real issues involved, lives at stake, including Benjamin's own. Contemporary Marxist analysis has learned from Benjamin; it has learned to speak earnestly about compassion. But its effects have been Sabbatean anyway, welcoming destruction as a utopian strategy, and supplanting any notion of truth or value other than the political.

But Scholem's critique of Benjamin was also so passionate because he shared some of Benjamin's weaknesses. Though Scholem's awareness of moral issues was keen, his work was almost consciously directed elsewhere. The ethical and social element of Jewish law—central concerns—were neglected in Scholem's interpretations in favor of the metaphysics of mysticism. In his own life he was, at first, not so much an "empirical" Zionist as a religious-mystical one. As he wrote, "I was one of those who took the biblical passage 'And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation' as the definition of Zionism." In the 1920's he joined the Brit Shalom, which favored the establishment of a binational state in Palestine rather than a Jewish one. To be sure, following the Holocaust, he was to become more pragmatic, but for Scholem, neither Israel in the political realm nor Israel as a religious phenomenon provided the answers to his more inchoate dreams of spiritual renewal—dreams originating in the Germany of the early years of this century. For Scholem, in fact, no political scheme could have satisfied the dream that he brought to Palestine. He, like Benjamin, searched for redemption outside of history. But what saved him, and ultimately condemned Benjamin, was that he saw history with enough clarity to compromise for survival.

Scholem, with his faith and his clarity, also constructed a universe in which Benjamin, with his nihilism and uncertainty, could never fit. While the results of Benjamin's redemptive "blasting" of history are both opaque and inconclusive, Scholem actually succeeded in establishing his own influential "continuum." Scholem's vision of Jewish mysticism is peculiarly and almost self-consciously modernist—and later scholars of the field he pioneered have already begun to subject his interpretations to radical revision. But though he wrote that Jewish mysticism was "deliberately unsystematic," so thoroughly did he bring it into the light of understanding that he also made it eminently rational and coherent, a body of thought so elegant that even Sabbateanism, its most irrational manifestation, could be interpreted as a source of the Enlightenment.

Benjamin took the measure of Scholem's achievement, and he could never forget the challenge it posed. For Scholem, more than any of Benjamin's other nemeses and correspondents, spoke with the stern voice of historical experience. This may have been the secret of Benjamin's obsession with Klee's *Angelus Novus*. This "angel of history" may have even suggested to Benjamin the spirit of Scholem himself; it was, after all, left to Scholem in his will, and in their early correspondence it was dubbed the "protector of the kabbalah." The angel, Benjamin writes, "resembles all from which I have had to part"—yet it faces and grips him tightly, meaning to pull him along just as Scholem attempted to draw Benjamin into the promise of an earthly if not a heavenly Zion.

This friendship was in fact a wrestling match. To Scholem, there was a connection between the *Angelus Novus* and Jacob's meeting with the angel in Genesis: "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. . . . And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained." To strain at the image a bit ourselves, we might imagine both Scholem and Benjamin wrestling, in their vastly different ways, against the angel of history, "until the breaking of day." Theirs was a struggle to wrest from the divine some sort of promise for the present, to redeem fallen man, to restore his language and his faith, to overcome the accumulation of historical catastrophe.

The coming of the Nazis and of the Gulag have made it clear that this was not just a metaphysical conflict. Blood flowed. Benjamin himself fell by his own hand, of a dose of morphine, though not before breathing a sigh of relief when the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed and absolved him of the need to sustain his mask of advocacy for the Soviet Union.

Scholem was undoubtedly the more resolute presence, grasping hold and not releasing his self-appointed adversary until daybreak, when some hint of redemption was offered. It came in the new name of Israel, the same name given by the angel to Jacob, "for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." But in the work of both men, and in the intellectuals who have followed them, indelible marks of this encounter yet remain.

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A Boy's Own Author

Joseph Epstein

TASTE in reading, like taste in food, tends to be formed early and changed seldom. Despite all the therapeutically salutary effects that Bruno Bettelheim claims fairy tales have on children, my own recollection is that, when read to me by my father, they bored the Doctor Dentons off me. I do not wish to exaggerate the sapience of my early childhood, but I do not think I lent much credence to stories about witches, spiders, and giants. I considered Hansel and Gretel dopes for letting themselves be so easily taken in; and as for Jack and the Beanstalk, I felt that anyone dumb enough to trade a live cow for a mess of beans had whatever trouble he encountered coming to him. I preferred Robin Hood, with his heroism and battles against injustice. I was also nuts about Bible stories, read to me by my father in a children's version, which featured blood and thunder—like those of Abraham and Isaac, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath—and in which something serious was at stake. Right out of the chute, then, my tastes in literature ran to realism, and to realism, now more than forty-five years later, they still chiefly run.

For someone given a rather nice literary start in life by a thoughtful father, I never read much on my own once I was in school and hence I suppose it could be said that I dropped the ball. More precisely, once in school I picked up the ball, becoming a kid who played almost full time whatever ball game was in season. There were other fine distractions: radio programs, the movies, comic books. A company that produced comic-book versions of such classic adventure stories as *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *Tom Brown's School Days* was then flourishing. For minor racketeers such as yours truly, who already had too many strenuous demands on his time to allow for the reading of books, these were extremely useful as fodder for the classroom exercise known as book reports. Somewhere between the ages of nine and twelve I believe I read two books, *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* and *The Black Stallion*. I hugely enjoyed both, yet did not do anything to search out others. My case was similar, I suppose, to that of Nancy Mitford's father, Lord Redesdale, who claimed to have read only one book in his life, Jack London's *White Fang*. "It's so frightfully good," he is reported to have announced, "I've never bothered to read another." For my part, I never bothered to find out if the authors of *Hans Brinker* and *The Black Stallion* had written other books; and to this day, in fact, I do not know their names.

Most children, I suspect, are inchoate New Critics, in that they are mainly interested in stories and poems, the work itself, and not in the man or woman who wrote it or the conditions of its composition. I must have heard the names of Dickens and Shakespeare, and possibly that of Mark Twain, but the first author who had a distinct existence for me when I was a boy was a man, still very much alive when I began to read his books in my thirteenth year (1950), named John R. Tunis. I don't believe anyone recommended a Tunis book to me; mine was not a crowd in which that sort of thing went on. (If there were any readers among the boys I ran with, they would have to have been closet cases.) But I do remember slipping a volume, bright red and trimmed in black, off one of the lower shelves of the library of the Daniel Boone Public Elementary School, my attention having been caught by its title, which was *All-American*. It was, as I had hoped, a story about football, high-school football; better still, among its characters, though not its protagonist, was a Jewish halfback named Meyer Goldman. It had lots of action, prejudice and snobbery, drawings by an illustrator named Hans Walleen, a fit moral—and the whole thing was brought in at under two hundred and fifty pages. I lapped it up in a single sitting.

Over the next year or so I scrambled to locate every book by John R. Tunis that I could find. He had written a few nonfiction books, I discovered, though I took a pass on those and read only his novels and then only those novels in which sports played a central role. I read him on football, I read him on basketball, I read him on baseball (more on baseball than on any other sport), I read him on track, and I read him on tennis, a sport I had myself just begun to take up in a fair-

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ly serious way. I lived a good deal of the time between my thirteenth and fourteenth year in a world of John R. Tunis's imagining—that is, I imagined myself a character in one or another of Tunis's novels. " 'Pock' went the big serve, and Joe Epstein strode to the net."

John R. Tunis's novels were about a good deal besides sports—he was, as I have discovered on rereading a number of them, almost relentlessly preaching, a true and full-time message man—but it was the subject of sports that snared me. In his autobiography Sidney Hook reports that, during his early years as an elementary-school teacher, he was able to teach a class of mentally delinquent boys the rudiments of arithmetic and geography by demonstrating the use of arithmetic in compiling baseball batting averages and the use of geography in determining the location of big-league teams. My own mental delinquency was not quite so considerable as that, but the truth is that sports was all I cared to read about. The sports section was the only portion of the newspaper that interested me. Apart from thumbing through the pages of each week's *Life*, the only magazine I read was a monthly called *Sport*, and this I read with the intensity of a full-court press, cover to cover, the letters from readers, up and down the masthead, the whole thing. Among the editors were men with such names as Al Silverman and Ed Fitzgerald (please note the locker-room familiarity of Al and Ed, no Allans or Edwards permitted). The magazine contained profiles of contemporary athletes. "Yogi likes plenty of pizza in the off-season," a characteristic line from *Sport* might run, "and can usually be found hanging out at his friend Phil Rizzuto's bowling alley." The magazine also carried splendid historical pieces, under the rubric of "The Sport Classic," about such legendary figures as Jim Thorpe (The Carlisle Indian), Ty Cobb (The Georgia Peach), Jack Dempsey (The Manassa Mauler), and Bill Tilden (Big Bill, who, it was later to be revealed, liked plenty of boys in the off-season). There was also a Sport Quiz, which tested your knowledge of all sports, past and present. It was the only test on which I ever cared passionately about doing well.

In me John R. Tunis had an ideal reader—but not, I hasten to add, in me alone, for thousands of boys similarly hooked on sports read him with something like the same ardor. Tunis published his first novel for boys in 1938, when he was forty-nine-years old, and from the outset generations have read him and, apparently, still do.* It is to Tunis I owe my first knowledge that reading can be as intense a pleasure as any that life has to offer. This dawned on me when, to my own youthful astonishment, I stayed home one sunny summer afternoon with a Tunis novel, preferring, in this amazing instance, to read about baseball when I could have actually been playing it.

An audience of youngsters is a tough audience to crack. Tunis knew this very well. In his autobiography, *A Measure of Independence* (1964), written when he was seventy-five, he addressed the question directly:

> A book written for my audience doesn't have to be merely as good as a book for adults; it must —or should be—better. Not only does youth deserve the best, but also no youths read a book because it is on the best-seller list. There is no best-seller list. Nor do they read it because it has a huge advertising budget, or is well reviewed; they read it for one reason alone, they want to. They find it says something to them in an area they know and understand. These readers are important, perhaps the most important in the country today.

What, I wonder, did John R. Tunis's novels say to me when I first read them at thirteen? What did I think when, early in the novel *All-American*, I read the following sentence: "After all, it was something to have a father who had played football, who understood these things"? The man in question, Robert Perry, who is the father of the young hero of the novel, played, moreover, at Yale, has a high position in a bank, and sends his son to pick up his resoled golf shoes. My own father left school in Montreal to come to Chicago at seventeen, worked in the costume jewelry business with men with such names as Sidney Ginsberg, Abe Levine, and Manny Dubinsky, and owned business shoes only. "Two different worlds," the old song runs, "we come from two different worlds."

THE world John R. Tunis wrote about —small-town, Gentile, very American —was one about which I had the kind of intense curiosity available only to those who felt themselves ultimately excluded from it. What I did not know at the time, having no interest in authors apart from their ability to deliver an interesting story, was that so, in a way, was Tunis excluded from the kind of life he wrote about. Tunis was not a Jew, nor the son of immigrants, but he did grow up without a father and in highly unusual circumstances. His father's was a wealthy New York family, of Dutch descent, who had done extremely well in various kinds of speculation around the time of the Civil War. In the view of his family, Tunis's father made two crucial mistakes: the first was to leave the Episcopalian Church to become a (Harvard-trained) Unitarian minister; the second was to marry a woman, three or so years older than he, whose father was a waiter. Tunis's father was disowned for this latter act; no Tunis appeared at his wedding in New York. Even though he later returned to Episcopalianism, when he died of Bright's Disease—

* Although most of Tunis's books are now out of print, four of his baseball novels have recently been reissued by Gulliver Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: *The Kid from Tomkinsville*, 278 pp., $4.95; *World Series*, 248 pp., $4.95; *Keystone Kids*, 239 pp., $4.95; *Rookie of the Year*, 220 pp., $4.95.

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John was then seven, his brother five—no member of the Tunis family put in an appearance at the funeral.

In no John R. Tunis novel I have read—and, now, reread—does a mother figure as more than a sweet but mild pain in the neck. A mother in these books is generally someone who reminds a boy to take along his jacket or not to forget his galoshes. But in a case of art refusing to imitate life, John R. Tunis's own mother was a completely formidable woman, the chief influence in her two sons' lives, John's guide and critic and inspiration. After her young husband's death, she alone, quite without outside help, held her family together, kept up standards, and provided a model for her sons, both of whom loved her without qualification.

Caroline Roberts Tunis had gone to Normal College in New York (later Hunter College). When her husband died, she took a job first at the Brearley School for girls on the East Side of Manhattan. But before long she moved with her boys and her retired father—whom she never referred to as a waiter but always as a "steward"—to Cambridge, Massachusetts, principally, Tunis reports in his autobiography, because she wanted her sons to be near Harvard. "My mother had two articles of faith; first, that we should be brought up in the church of our father (Episcopalian), and second, attend Harvard, his college." Through her deceased husband's churchly connections, she arranged, with the help of Reverend Endicott Peabody, rector of Groton, to open an eating house for former students of Groton now at Harvard. This went quite well until 1904 when a student named Franklin Delano Roosevelt turned his fellow Grotonians against the idea of walking all the way to Mrs. Tunis's establishment in cold weather. Tunis's mother then turned to substitute teaching along with teaching immigrants the English language at night, and continued to teach until her retirement.

She was a Teddy Roosevelt Republican—her son John's one serious dissent from his mother was to become a liberal Democrat—a woman who believed in hard work, self-improvement, and the importance of culture. She read only serious books, usually with a critical eye; had reams of poetry stored in her memory; was often off to a concert or the opera; and read and argued with the editorials in the Boston *Evening Transcript*. In later life, she offered a running critical commentary on her son's books and articles—and later life lasted a good while, since she died at ninety-two. (Tunis himself died in 1975, at eighty-six.) "At ninety," she wrote to her son, "one does not get around as easily as at eighty-five. I find myself inclined to give in these days, instead of urging myself on as I once did." Perhaps the main reason John R. Tunis never included a mother figure like his own in any of his novels is that he did not have to, for his mother's spirit and idealism reign in everything he wrote.

Although Tunis grew up fatherless, without the security of money, written off by his father's wealthy family (who did later provide funds for him and his brother to attend college), he maintains in his autobiography that, despite all this, "never did we feel sorry for ourselves, for there was nothing to feel sorry about." One is ready to believe that, especially with so gallant a woman as his mother around, yet it must have been difficult watching her returning exhausted from cooking for other boys or from a double load of teaching. A boy growing up without a father, no matter how strong his mother, remains half an orphan; and this, too, could not have been easy. In many of Tunis's novels, the father is the moral center of the book, the figure whom a young man can turn to for balanced thought, perspective, good guidance. Where the father fails—as he does, notably, in *Yea! Wildcats!*, one of Tunis's Indiana high-school basketball novels—the coach steps in to play this role. But over many an adolescent crisis—physical courage, sportsmanship, masculine honor—a boy can only turn to a man for help.

It would be pushing things to say that Tunis grew up like Stephen Crane's Maggie, a child of the streets, but it is true to say that, had his father not been disowned by his family, Tunis and his brother would have gone to a school like Groton rather than had their mother cook for the boys who went there. Still, there were much worse streets to grow up on than those in Cambridge around the turn of the century. Once when he and his brother were out playing, their ball hit a carriage containing the baby of Professor Irving Babbitt, who complained to the police. Babbitt lived across the street, and the Cambridge Public Library, which was a big item in Tunis's life, was not far away. A few blocks distant were the thirty clay tennis courts of Jarvis Field, used by Harvard students but also available to the Tunis boys, who hung around hoping to be asked to fill in for someone else's missing doubles partner.

Sport was Tunis's passion as a boy, and he would later, of course, make a living out of writing about it. His grandfather taught him to read—to study is perhaps more precise—the sports pages in the daily newspaper. It was this same grandfather, his mother's father, who took him and his brother to their first major-league baseball game, which happened to be played in a National League park and thus left him a National League fan for life. (American or National League is one of those choices a sports-minded boy makes early in life and rarely departs from.) His mother was puzzled by her son's passion for games, but did nothing to interfere with it. Tunis, ever the moralist, maintains that as an adolescent he may never have learned the disciplines of working and saving, but he did acquire the disciplines of sport, which meant, among other things, "how to accept defeat, a lesson most Americans hate to accept, although de-

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feat comes to us all in the end and we had better be ready for it."

Tennis appears to have been Tunis's own best sport. Although he claims his brother was a more natural athlete than he—better coordinated, more stylish—he himself must have been a player of high competence. He played tennis for Harvard and, while working as a journalist abroad, he mentions playing in what sound like fairly serious second-line tournaments in Europe. Tennis was in any case the sport that lit him aflame with an excitement that went beyond the sport itself. In *A Measure of Independence* he tells how, in his fourteenth year, in 1903, he and his brother trekked out to the Longwood Cricket Club in Brookline to see the American national champion William A. Larned play a Davis Cup match against Laurie Doherty, representing England, who had won at Wimbledon. The Tunis boys had no money for a ticket of admission, so instead they watched the match sitting atop the huge barrels of a brewery wagon parked just outside the court. Tunis describes what he saw:

> I can still see Larned storming the net behind his powerful service, and Doherty passing him with an elegant backhand down the line, feet apart, his racket high in the air, poised in his follow-through like Mercury himself. Those fluid strokes, the crisp punched volleys of Larned, the classical purity of Doherty's shots off the ground, the attacks and ripostes of the two nervous men gave me, without my knowledge at the time, a feeling for art and beauty that was to be mine forever. This scene of grace and movement at Longwood that afternoon reached into me, touched my inner self, changed me for good. I was a boy no longer.

In this handsome paragraph, Tunis hints at a relationship between sport and art that I have never seen discussed. When he remarks that watching these two tennis players gave him "a feeling for art and beauty that was to be mine forever," he reminds me that sports provided my own first glimpses of mastery over materials, economy of execution, and elegance, which are among the qualities shared by the superior athlete and the artist. The superior artist is of course a figure of greater importance than the superior athlete, for what he creates has a chance to endure, but in the form, power of innovation, and authority of the athlete I, for one (and I suspect there have been thousands like me), had my first blessed inkling of what art can do. That there is an artistic component to the athlete is a point never pushed but always subtly in the background of Tunis's sports novels for boys, though I cannot say that I myself picked up on it at thirteen.

DESPITE his mother's intellectual earnestness, Tunis was far from being a good student, and claims to have "possessed no intellectual disciplines, being ignorant, lazy, and uninterested." In 1907 this did not prevent him from being admitted to Harvard, at a tuition fee —parents of today will be dismayed to learn—of $90, with the single condition that he take something called English A that sounds suspiciously like a remedial course. By his own reckoning, Tunis did not make very much of the intellectual opportunities at Harvard. He ran cross-country in the autumn, played tennis in the spring, and whenever possible sneaked off to the theater or a concert in Boston.

His closest friend when he entered Harvard was Conrad Aiken, the poet and critic, who, once at Harvard, began to move among such intellectually serious undergraduates as T.S. Eliot and Walter Lippmann. John Hall Wheelock, Van Wyck Brooks, Robert Benchley, and Norman Foerster were undergraduates at Harvard when Tunis was there, but he never saw them. He did become friends with a student whom he describes as "a worse runner than myself" named Frederick Lewis Allen, who later became editor of *Harper's*, for which Tunis wrote articles in the 1930's. (Joseph Kennedy, Sr., who was a year behind Tunis at Harvard, roomed across the hall from him.) The crucial—to hear him tell it, the only—intellectual experience of his Harvard days was hearing William Jennings Bryan speak at Sanders Theater; the Great Commoner's speech that afternoon turned him away from his Republican heritage and into a Democrat of strong populist-liberal strain.

In 1936, in the midst of the Depression, Tunis produced a book entitled *Was College Worth While?* that was timed to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his own class of 1911 and which turned out to be a strong attack on the hidebound nature of most Harvard men. Surveying his own class, he noted that "we are practically barren of leaders of public life" and that only "a small minority . . . appear to have done any original thinking in their field"; and he ends by saying that the chief ambition of this same class of men, "if their record tells the truth, is to vote the Republican ticket, to keep out of the bread line, and to break 100 at golf." (In an interview given to Jerome Holtzman when Tunis was eighty-four, this was changed to "break 80 at golf.") He eased the stringency of his criticism of Harvard a few years later, when, in 1938, he published a novel entitled *Iron Duke*, about a boy from Waterloo, Iowa, who comes east to Harvard and feels left out, nearly flunks out, but finally wins out though not on Harvard's rather snobbish terms but on his own: he becomes a track star, he makes the Dean's List, he turns down membership in an exclusive undergraduate club.

This book, *Iron Duke*, written when he was forty-nine, changed John R. Tunis's career. He had written novels before, but this was the first work he produced that was sold, in the trade lingo, as a "juvenile." When he learned that this was how Alfred Harcourt, the founder of Harcourt, Brace, planned to sell his book, Tunis was

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astounded—"shocked, rocked, deflated," he reports in his autobiography—for he did not write it as a book for young readers. The book sold more than 60,000 copies and twenty-five years after its publication was still bringing in respectable royalties. "I continued writing these so-called boys' books," Tunis told Jerome Holtzman, "but I've never considered them that." Perhaps herein is the secret of the success of Tunis's books for young readers: an absolute absence of condescension in their composition.

Until *Iron Duke*, Tunis was a free-lance, turning out as many as two books a year, picking up magazine pieces where he could, covering European tennis tournaments in the summers for American newspapers, knocking out roughly 2,000 words a day six days a week—doing, in short, all the dog work of the sadly misnamed free-lance. For a time he wrote sports pieces for Harold Ross at the *New Yorker*, usually for $50 apiece and, as late as the early 1930's, $200 for a longish profile. Of Ross, Tunis wrote: "Curiously Ross knew less about sport than any male American I ever met." (This has a familiar ring; other writers have remarked that Harold Ross was equally ignorant about culture and politics; all he seemed to know, apparently, was what a *New Yorker* piece on any given subject ought to read like.) Tunis tells about the time that Ross, being strapped for cash, offered Tunis sixty shares of *New Yorker* stock in lieu of payment he owed him for pieces. He would have taken it, too, had he not met Frank Crowninshield, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, returning from lunch at the Algonquin, who told him that the magazine's future looked shaky and to go for the cash. He took Crowninshield's bad advice, later determining that, with stock splits and dividends, this little disaster on 44th Street cost him somewhere in the neighborhood of a million dollars.

Although Tunis had begun to sell fiction to *Collier's* and to write nonfiction pieces for the *Saturday Evening Post*, his (so-called) "so-called boys books" eventually took him off the free-lancer's financial treadmill; they are also the chief reason for the endurance of such fame as Tunis still has. Of these books, Tunis, toward the end of his life, said, "They can be read by adults." Having just read—in most instances, reread—nine of them, I would say that the remark requires some qualification. Tunis's books can be read by an adult, but then an adult can also eat a bag of gum drops. It is probably a good idea for an adult not to do either too often. Still, I found Tunis's books highly readable and, for personal reasons, very moving.

To return to the books one loved in one's youth is to risk disappointment—in both the books and in oneself when young. I should not care ever to return to Willard Motley's *Knock On Any Door*, which at age sixteen I stayed awake through an entire night reading in the Brown Hotel in Des Moines, Iowa, while on the road working with my father. John Dos Passos's *USA*, which thrilled me the first time around at nineteen, many years later seemed, well, a bit hokey. As for John R. Tunis's books, there is nothing junky, or sickening, or second-rate about them. They do suffer from want of a very high level of complexity, but then I hardly expected Jamesian subtlety. In fact, upon rereading them I am rather proud of my thirteen-year-old self for thinking as well of them as I did. Although my memory of myself is that of a fairly frivolous, genial goof-off, perhaps after all I was rather more serious than I remember.

I say this because, I now realize, the Tunis books are pretty serious, and I was utterly absorbed in them. All the novels I then read—and now have reread—are about sports, but they are only ostensibly about sports. Sports is the subject; other matters make up the theme. And even when sports is being discussed, things peripheral to the game itself loom interestingly large. Soon after *The Kid from Tomkinsville* (1940), which is probably Tunis's best baseball novel, gets going, Tunis invites his readers to consider the situation of the thirty-eight-year-old catcher Dave Leonard, on his way to spring training with the Brooklyn Dodgers. At thirty-eight, Leonard's mind is very much on staying with the club and even more on his future. He is making $12,500 (the year is 1940), which is a good salary. But he is a family man. "Twelve-five," he thinks. "They don't pay salaries like that to rookie catchers at any rate. Nor to veterans either, for long." Still, at his age, an age when most businessmen are just getting going, he is coming to the end of the line. "Twelve-five, yep, sounds like a lot of money. But he needed three years before some of his insurance came due and the load lightened."

What did I think of this when I first read it at thirteen? Why should a kid of thirteen give a rat's rump about the financial problems of an old guy of thirty-eight? I cannot recall exactly, but my guess is that I loved such passages in Tunis. For one thing, there was the realism of it (the son of parents who had come through the Depression, I had heard often enough how tough it could be to make a living); for another, it was fine to have such adult—such *real*—problems up for discussion. Material of this kind took you behind the scenes; it treated you, as a reader, like a grownup, which was a genuine compliment, especially since at thirteen, you probably thought of yourself as a grownup anyway.

Tunis's books are studded with such stuff. In *Yea! Wildcats!* (1944) he tells you about the corrupt way that tickets are parceled out for the state high-school basketball tournaments in Indiana. The coach in that novel refuses to get tickets for anyone, an independent stand that, like all such stands in Tunis, comes to cost him dearly. Sometimes the presentation of inside material is conjoined with Tunis's own strong views. Although he had worked as a journalist himself,

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Tunis did not much care for the general run of the breed: he took them to be paid kibitzers whose self-appointed job was to spread dissension among athletes, increase pressure on everyone, and make trouble generally. In *Rookie of the Year* (1944), another of his baseball books, he sets out the various techniques that sports writers use to sniff out a story, and leaves them with the grandeur of, say, a third-class hotel house dick. "An ounce of curiosity plus a pound of brass coupled with the sensitivity of a rhino and the pertinacity of a tiger," he writes in *Rookie of the Year*, "that's what makes a reporter." I am not certain what I made of that formulation at thirteen, but at fifty it seems to me quite on target.

Of course, how ballplayers feel about night games, the outside pressures on managers and coaches, the conditions of tournament tennis—none of this would have made much impression if John R. Tunis were not extremely good at telling a story. And telling a story, in a sports novel, largely means being able to describe action. This Tunis can do exceedingly well. He has a commanding sense of pace; he knows when to describe a game sketchily and when to go into intricate detail. He has a nice sense of proportion, which prevents him from ever allowing his heroes to become supermen, and hence unbelievable, on the field. He is excellent at describing tennis, good at football, a bit less sure of himself at basketball, and perhaps best of all at baseball. He has the knack of instructing while describing without making a reader feel as if he were being talked down to. Narrating a doubleplay in *Keystone Kids* (1943), for example, Tunis writes:

> The two boys were off together. Both were near the ball, on top of it almost, so fast that either could have stabbed for it. But Bob suddenly realized his brother was the one to make the play, and as he neared the bag sheered away to clear the path for the throw. Spike picked up the ball a few feet from the base, and in one continuous motion touched the bag and hurled the ball to first in time to nab the fastest runner in baseball. Only an expert could have felt their understanding, their coordination as they made that decision in the fraction of a second when the ball roared toward them. The two men in the box behind the dugout missed nothing. They looked at each other. Base hits, they knew, were a matter of feet. Doubleplays were a matter of inches.

John R. Tunis, as they say about superior infielders, could pick it.

I SUPPOSE a boy of thirteen reading Tunis today might miss an item or two of a factual kind. Such a boy, a habitual reader of today's sports pages, might be mildly amused at the relatively small sums ballplayers then earned (there is talk in one of the Tunis novels about a World Series winner's share of $6,000 per player and endorsements earning only $250). There is a real possibility that he might miss references to such then-living figures as Grantland Rice, Al Schacht, and Hank Greenberg. Will he know that the defensive shift used against the character Cecil McDade in the novel *Highpockets* (1948) is based on the shift used on Ted Williams; or that an announcer named Snazzy Beane is based on Dizzy Dean; or that Jack McManus, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers in the baseball novels, is loosely based on Larry McPhail? Then there are distinctly time-bound references to the Quiz Kids, the Aldrich family, Fred Allen (not the *Harper's* editor, the radio comic). Such a boy might be puzzled by the period slang—"Thunderation!," one character thinks, and the phrase "That was something like!" occurs repeatedly—or by the corny nicknames Tunis is in the habit of assigning his ballplayers: Spike and Bones and Razzle and Rats and Fat Stuff. A young boy today, rising from his personal computer, might be put off by any or all of this.

But it would be a pity if he were, for he would miss a great deal. Not least, he would miss Tunis's teaching, which is to say his moral instructions, which is to say his message(s). Recounting his own methods of composition in his books for boys, Tunis writes that the story must be told "simply, quickly, effectively," and that "when you allow a 'message' to take over, you are lost." He also remarks in his autobiography, apropos of the George Alfred Henty *Rollo* books he read in his own youth: "As boys have ever done—and thank God, ever will—we skipped the culture and the moralizing and gulped down the accounts of life in distant lands." Nothing of any of this applies to Tunis's own books, which taken together have more messages than Western Union. True, the messages in Tunis are generally artfully mixed with the action of the stories, but I know that I picked them up when young, and if I had not, so plain are they, I would have to have been declared a moral dyslexic.

Tunis's many messages divide into general and particular categories. In the general category, there are the lessons that sport teaches: the need for discipline, for the willingness to subsume one's own selfish interests in the greater good of the team, for the courage to come back from defeat. In *The Kid from Tomkinsville*, when the Dodgers come from well behind to make a stretch drive for the pennant, even the fans of the rival New York Giants at the Polo Grounds are impressed. "Because," Tunis writes, "sport offers no more inspiring spectacle than the man or the team who comes back, who takes the cracks of fate and pulls them together to rise once more." *Highpockets* is about a great natural athlete who turns from being a selfish loner, out only to compile impressive statistics that will earn him a larger salary, to become a team player. " 'That's the trouble with this country nowadays,' " an older player and coach tells him after he comes around, " 'everyone out for himself, aiming to hit the long ball over the fence.' "

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The sense of a team is the great moment in Tunis novels; it is one of the overarching ideas in all his work. This applied to life as well as to sports. When a child is operated on in *Highpockets*, medicine, too, turns out to be "a sort of team, y'see." And what was this almost mystical entity, a team? "It was everything in sport and in life, yet nothing you touch or see or feel or even explain to someone else. A team was like an individual, a character, fashioned by work and suffering and disappointment and sympathy and understanding, perhaps not least of all by defeat." What Tunis is addressing here is character in its collective sense; in his novels the molding of character is always an individual matter, with a high-school athlete or professional ballplayer put through the test. Character, in Tunis, is won through discipline, through perseverance, through learning from defeat. This is a very old-fashioned notion. John R. Tunis taught me to believe in it when I was a boy. The odd thing is, I still do believe in it.

On the particular side, Tunis's messages tended to be those of the old-style liberal, the hater of snobbery and prejudice. *All-American*, a novel written in 1942 when the defeat of Hitler was far from certain, turns out to be a book about American democracy. In it a quarterback named Ronald Perry transfers from a prep school called the Academy to a public school called Abraham Lincoln High. Many are this book's messages, a number of them delivered by the public-school principal: "In this school, Ronald, every pupil has to be responsible for himself. That's one of the principles of a democracy, isn't it?" Several are the book's conflicts, the concluding one occurring when Abraham Lincoln High's football team learns that, after winning their conference, Ned LeRoy, their fine Negro end, cannot travel with the team to an intersectional game in Miami because of Southern segregation policy. The team, led by Ronald, decides not to play without Ned and so the trip is canceled, much to the consternation of the town's leading citizens. In Tunis's novels about high-school athletes, adults almost invariably are wrong when they take too keen an interest in high-school sports, interfering in a way that turns out to be detrimental to the boys and to the sport itself. A notable exception is Hooks Barnum, the coach of Ridgewood High, in *Go, Team, Go!* (1954), whose coaching and character have a salubrious effect on the team, "as the character of a good man always does in sport." But in the main the message is that left to themselves, youngsters have fairly good instincts about fair play, and so they ought, in fact, to be left to themselves.

In *Keystone Kids*, Tunis takes on the subject of anti-Semitism in telling the story of Jocko Klein, the rookie catcher of the Dodgers, who is taunted by his own teammates as well as by opposing teams for being a Jew. Helping Jocko fight off the anti-Semitism of his own teammates is the young Southern manager of the Dodgers, Spike Russell, who himself does not exactly possess an advanced degree in social work from the University of Chicago. Instead he has an instinctual sense of the unfairness of singling out a man in this way, a feeling that anti-Semitism is tearing apart not only the man but the team, and the strong belief that it cannot be allowed to go on. He offers some crude advice to Jocko—"You gotta think of yourself as a catcher, not as a Jew"—and some that turns out to be important to him: "Boy, you gotta take it in this game same as you gotta take it in life. Get me? Understand. . . . Don't quit." And —need I say it?—Jocko does not quit; he eventually faces down his chief tormentor; the team finally unites and returns to the business at hand, which is winning the National League pennant.

Later in the same novel, Tunis runs through the ethnic origins, and offers potted histories, of the ancestors of the various members of the Dodgers, extending his notion of the concept of the team into a metaphor for America itself which not even so unliterary a kid as I could have missed. My guess is that, when I first came across it, I was much moved. It reads strangely today, nearly thirty years after it was written and after the great efflorescence of ethnic pride that has swept this country in recent decades. Reading it now, I am still moved, even though the dream of America as a team made up of very different people—a dream that was also at the center of Tunis's vision as a writer—seems rather tattered and fading.

"Don't quit," Spike Russell tells Jocko Klein, in what may be John R. Tunis's essential message. It is the message that he apparently took from his own life. Of the difficulties of his own early freelancing days, he writes in his autobiography: "Often I stumbled and fell; but usually got up, bruised and sore, and went on. It wasn't courage but stupidity that kept me going. . . . How many times in life when talent is lacking, sheer persistence pays off." I believe that, too. On rereading him now in my middle life, I find that there is not much at the heart of John R. Tunis's books for boys that I do not still believe. Whether I originally acquired these beliefs from him, or whether I had first to hack my way through jungles of intellectual obfuscation before returning to them, I do not know. But of the influences that helped form me, I now think of the books of John R. Tunis as a very real one.

"Highpockets had learned something," Tunis writes. "There's no easy way to a boy's heart. Like everything else, you have to work for it." John R. Tunis did, and he still has mine.

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The Columbus Argument

David Stove

THERE might be good arguments for being anti-conservative in particular circumstances. But are there any good arguments for being anti-conservative in *all* circumstances? If there are, they would clearly have to be very general arguments: general enough to be philosophical, or at least to be of interest to philosophers.

There has only ever been one very general argument for anti-conservatism, as far as I know, and it is not a good one. But it is one which has been so widely *thought* good that hardly anyone in the last 150 years, touched at all by education, can have entirely escaped its influence. I call it the " 'They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus' Argument," and for short "the Columbus argument." It goes as follows: "Throughout almost all of human history, people who have proposed innovations, whether in belief or in behavior, have met with hostility. Death, or persecution, or derision, or at best neglect, has been the regular reward for their efforts. Yet whatever improvements have actually been made in human life, either in our opinions or in our practice, have depended, and must always depend, on some innovator in the first place. We ought, therefore, not merely to tolerate, but to welcome, innovators."

The germ of the argument goes back to Socrates's suggestion, when on trial for his life, that he actually deserved not death but a life pension from the state, for the moral and intellectual stimulation he had given it. But the modern *locus classicus* is, of course, John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* (1859). And the argument in the form which Mill gave it (which is essentially as I have given it above) has swept the world. With every day that has passed since Mill published it, it has been more influential than it was the day before. In the intellectual and moral dissolution of the West in the 20th century, every step has depended on conservatives being disarmed, at some critical point, by the Columbus argument: by revolutionaries claiming that any resistance made to them is only another instance of that undeserved hostility which beneficial innovators have so regularly met with in the past.

Mill's essay did not go unanswered in its own time. Some conservatives saw clearly enough both the dangerousness, and the weakness, of the Columbus argument. The best reply to *On Liberty* was *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873), a book by J.F. Stephen (Leslie Stephen's brother and hence Virginia Woolf's uncle). The contest was very unequal intellectually: Stephen made mincemeat of Mill. But, historically, his book soon vanished without trace, while Mill's essay continued its all-conquering career.

We need no books to teach us now how dangerous the Columbus argument is: we have as our teacher instead the far greater authority of experience—*expériences nombreuses et funestes* (as Laplace said in another connection). For "They all laughed at Christopher Columbus" led, by a transition both natural and reasonable, to "It's an outrageous proposal, but we'll certainly consider it." That in turn led, naturally enough, to "We *must* consider it *because* it's an outrageous proposal." And this in turn has brought us to the uncontrollable violence and irrationality of life in the free countries in 1987. People who have surrendered, in their own minds, the right to deride ideas however absurd, or to repress conduct however vicious, are (as the vulgar in Australia say) history.

As to the weakness of the Columbus argument, it is perfectly glaring. No doubt it is true that, for any change for the better to have taken place, either in thought or in practice, someone first had to make a new departure. But it is equally true that someone first had to make a new departure in order for any change for the *worse* ever to have taken place. And there must have been at least as many proposed innovations which were or would have been for the worse as ones which were or would have been for the better. But if in the past bad innovations have been at least as common as good ones, then we have at least as much reason to conclude that we ought to *discourage* innovators in the future as to conclude that we ought to encourage them.

How did an argument so easily answered ever impose upon intelligent people? Easily. It was simply a matter of ensuring what Ludwig Wittgenstein (in another connection) called *a one-sided diet of examples*. Mention no past innovators except those who were innovators-for-the-better. Harp away endlessly on the examples of Columbus and Copernicus, Galileo and Bruno, Socrates and (if you think the traffic will bear it) Jesus. Conceal the fact that there must have been at least one innovator-for-the-worse for every one of these (very overworked) good guys. Never mention Lenin or Pol Pot, Marx or Hegel, Robespierre or the Marquis de

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Sade, or those forgotten innovators of genius to whom humanity has been indebted for any of the countless insane theories which have ever acquired a following in astronomy, geology, or biology. There is no weakness in the Columbus argument which cannot be more than made up for by a sufficiently tendentious choice of examples.

In fact, of course, innovators-for-the-worse have always been far *more* numerous than innovators-for-the-better: they always *must* be so. Consider the practical side first. Do you understand television sets well enough to be able to repair a non-functioning one or to improve a malfunctioning one? Probably not: very few do. And if you, being one of the great majority, nevertheless do set out to repair or improve a TV set, it is a million to one, because of the complexity of the thing, that you will make it worse if you change it at all. Now human societies, at least ones as large and rich as ours, are incomparably more complex than TV sets, and in fact no one understands them well enough to repair or improve them. Whatever some people may claim, there are no society repairmen, as there are TV repairmen. So if anyone gets to try out in practice his new idea for repairing or improving our society, it is something like billions-to-one that he will actually make things worse if he changes them at all. Of course it is possible that he will make things better, but that is trivially true: it is possible, after all, that a furious kick will repair your ailing TV set.

The same holds for innovations in belief, at any rate in sciences like physics and chemistry; for those are intellectual structures of a size and richness comparable with our social structures. Even there, of course, it is always possible that a heretic or an amateur is right and the scientific establishment wrong. But then, possibility is cheap, as I have just pointed out: the thing is extremely improbable, that's all, and you would be extremely irrational to believe it in any given case. Physicists and chemists rightly try, therefore, to maintain a professional organization and a screen designed to exclude the teeming would-be Columbuses whose letters begin, "I do not have a science degree, but . . . ."

In less advanced sciences, of course, the situation is proportionately different. And by the time you come to the festering slums, such as sociology and anthropology have now become, the situation is quite reversed. There, almost any innovation *would* be for the better, and the rankest amateur, if he could get his foot in the door, would be sure to raise the tone of the place out of sight, morally of course, but even intellectually.

MILL pleaded in *On Liberty* for the widest variety of what he chose to call "experiments in living." The phrase was a sickeningly dishonest attempt to capture some of the deserved prestige of science for things which had not the remotest connection with science; principally—need I say?—certain sexual and domestic arrangements of a then-novel kind. Certain respectable people had dropped him, because of his irregular association with Mrs. Harriet Taylor, and Mill thought that this showed clearly the need for a whole new, and more open-minded, philosophy of life. Not much more than that: he would probably have been horrified even by something like the Oneida Community.

Yet only sixty-odd years before Mill wrote *On Liberty*, certain more momentous "experiments in living" had been performed on France, by the Babeufs and the Robespierres. And even while he wrote, the Marxes, Bakunins, etc. were filling Europe with their announcements of the far more drastic "experiments in living" which they were preparing. It is idle to say that Mill could not have foreseen what these things portended: other people could and did foresee what they portended, and no one in England knew what was happening in Europe better than Mill did. The longer he lived, the more his writings worked to the advantage of the socialist "experiments," even when (as in the case of *On Liberty*) they were not intended to do so.

Here, then, is a sufficiently curious sequence of events. A philosopher publishes an argument in favor of welcoming innovations. This argument is so bad that, on its own, it could hardly have deceived a child of ten. Supplemented, however, by a tendentious selection of examples, this argument sweeps the world, and does more than anything else to bring about the present internal dissolution, and external irresolution, of free countries.

Yet some people think that philosophers, and cheap tricks of argument, do not matter.

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Toni Morrison's Career

Carol Iannone

NEARLY twenty-five years ago, the literary critic Irving Howe and the novelist Ralph Ellison engaged in a heated debate on the options of the black writer in America. In an article that appeared in *Dissent* in 1963, Howe suggested that, given the nature of the Negro experience in this country, black writers would find themselves inescapably drawn in their work to the expression of "plight and protest." "How could a Negro put pen to paper, how could he so much as think or breathe, without some impulsion to protest. . . ?"

In Howe's judgment, the work of James Baldwin provided an instructive negative instance of the rule. Baldwin's hopeful aesthetic intention was to present (in Howe's words) "the Negro world in its diversity and richness . . . as a living culture of men and women who, even when deprived, share in the emotions and desires of common humanity." But although there was something to be said for self-consciously going against the grain of social protest set by such classic works as Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Baldwin had failed in his own purposes as a writer. Even Ralph Ellison's great novel *Invisible Man*, which "astonishes" with "the apparent freedom it displays from the ideological and emotional penalties suffered by Negroes in this country," faltered when it came to "the sudden, unprepared, and implausible assertion of unconditioned freedom with which the novel ends," when the black hero abandons politics and asserts that "my world has become one of infinite possibilities." As Howe put it, "The unfortunate fact remains that to define one's individuality is to stumble upon social barriers which stand in the way, all too much in the way, of 'infinite possibilities.'"

Ellison's reply was published in the *New Leader* later that year, and a subsequent issue of the same magazine offered Howe's response with yet another rejoinder by Ellison. To Ellison, the possibilities of "personal realization," both for the Negro and for the Negro writer, were greater than Howe had allowed. For one thing, Howe "seems never to have considered that American Negro life . . . is, for the Negro who must live it, not only a burden (and not always that) but also a *discipline*—just as any human life which has endured so long is a discipline teaching its own insights into the human condition, its own strategies of survival."

Moreover, Ellison observed, there is "an American Negro tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain. It is a tradition which abhors as obscene any trading on one's own anguish for gain or sympathy; which springs not from a desire to deny the harshness of existence but from a will to deal with it as men at their best have always done."

Finally, said Ellison, for the writer, "no matter how strictly Negroes are segregated socially and politically, on the level of the imagination their ability to achieve freedom is limited only to their individual aspiration, insight, energy, and will." As for "the question of how the 'sociology of his existence' presses upon a Negro writer's work," that "depends upon how much of his life the individual is able to transform into art."

To Howe's direct response ("In what ways can a Negro writer—indeed, any Negro—achieve 'personal realization' as long as the American Negroes remain oppressed? To what extent can he achieve 'personal realization' apart from the common effort of his people to win their full freedom?"), Ellison suggested that Howe "ask himself in what way shall a Negro writer achieve personal realization (as a writer) *after* his people shall have won their full freedom? The answer appears to be the same in both instances: He will have to go it alone! He must suffer alone even as he shares the suffering of his group."

It may seem at first glance that the black-power movement of the late 60's and 70's settled the question as to which type of black literary expression would gain ascendancy, and settled it in favor of "plight and protest." But the fact is that the debate continues, perhaps not so much among black writers as within each of them. Howe ended his original essay by noting that "One generation passes its dilemmas on to the next, black boys on to native sons." A decade or so later, he might have added, "and on to native daughters." In certain crucial ways, the terms and implications of the Howe/Ellison standoff—the tension between protest and transcendence, between suffering and strength, between determinism and personal will, between collective and individual identity—inform and structure the work of the much celebrated black woman novelist, Toni Morrison, whose latest book, *Beloved*,* is now high on the best-seller lists.

TONI MORRISON was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, the second of four children, in Lorain, a

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small northern Ohio town. Her grandfather, a boy at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, was "an unreconstructed black pessimist," as Miss Morrison has told it, who "was . . . convinced that there was no hope whatever for black people in this country." By contrast, his wife "believed that all things could be improved by faith in Jesus and an effort of the will." These contrasting attitudes persisted with Miss Morrison's parents. Both "assumed that black people were the humans of the globe" but "differed about whether the moral fiber of white people would ever improve." (Her father felt no, her mother yes.) Thus, Miss Morrison admits, "I grew up in a basically racist household with more than a child's share of contempt for white people," and she has asserted on at least one occasion that "my hatred of white people is justified and their hatred for me is not."

Miss Morrison speaks eloquently of the "resistance, excellence, and integrity that were so much a part of our past," and in doing so she is clearly speaking from the treasured experience of her own childhood. Her father was a skilled shipyard welder who held three jobs simultaneously for seventeen years, her mother a spirited woman who dealt honorably with bill collectors and once wrote President Roosevelt to obtain better-quality food during a period when the family had to go on relief. (She got it.) Miss Morrison was the only black child in her first-grade class and the only one who could read. In adolescence, she devoured the great Russian novelists, *Madame Bovary*, Jane Austen, and was to say of them years later: "Those books were not written for a little black girl in Lorain, Ohio, but they were so magnificently done that I got them anyway—they spoke directly to me out of their own specificity . . . when I wrote my first novel years later I wanted to capture that same specificity about the nature and feeling of the culture *I* grew up in."

After graduating with honors from high school, Miss Morrison attended Howard University, where she changed her name to Toni, and met LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) and Andrew Young. She then took her M.A. at Cornell, where she wrote a thesis on the theme of suicide in William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. When she returned to Howard as an instructor in 1957, she numbered among her students Stokely Carmichael and Claude Brown, the latter of whom asked her to read the 800-page manuscript that was to become *Manchild in the Promised Land*. During her years at Howard she also married Howard Morrison, a Jamaican architect; the marriage ended before the birth of her second son. She began working as an editor for Random House, first in textbooks in Syracuse, then in trade in New York City, where she published many black, mostly female, writers such as Toni Cade Bambara and Gayle Jones, as well as the autobiographies of Angela Davis and Muhammad Ali. She also edited *The Black Book*, a scrapbook of 300 years of black American life.

After the dissolution of her marriage, Miss Morrison began to write seriously, and in 1970 published her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, to respectful reviews. Her second novel, *Sula*, appeared in 1973 and gained her national recognition. *Song of Solomon*, 1977, was received with wild enthusiasm, became a best-seller, and entered its author in the lists of noted contemporary novelists; it was the first black novel since Richard Wright's *Native Son* to become a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, and also won the National Book Critics Circle Award. A fourth novel, the best-selling *Tar Baby*, was published in 1981, and landed its author on the cover of *Newsweek*; it was followed by this season's *Beloved*. Miss Morrison has also written a play, *Dreaming Emmett*.

Miss Morrison calls her novels "village literature," "peasant literature," and they do indeed portray an exotic, fantastical world, derived from her childhood, in which even the everyday black life of ordinary Midwestern towns comes alive in folklore, magic, superstition, fable, poetry, song, and myth; in odd, quirky characters colorfully nicknamed or named from the Bible; in vibrant, flavorful, and frequently humorous dialogue and bizarre, extraordinarily conceived situations; and in Miss Morrison's clear, seamless language.

In classic plight-and-protest style, Miss Morrison's novels do also present the "trauma" (in Howe's word) of black life, with blacks as much the victims of black cruelty as of white, and by no means always in the male-upon-female pattern that has been much noted of late. To be sure, the trauma is implicitly or explicitly set within the oppression of a racist society, but the picture that emerges of black life is nevertheless frequently "harrowing" (as Diane Johnson has observed).

The Bluest Eye attempts to show the terrible consequences for blacks of internalizing the values of a white culture that both directly and indirectly rejects them. The novel is set in the years just before World War II in Lorain, Ohio. Eleven-year-old Pecola is a poor ugly black girl who prays to have blue eyes in the poignant, wistful hope that this will bring her the love she longs for and also somehow alleviate the multiple miseries of her hate-filled, quarrelsome, violent family, ironically named Breedlove. Pecola becomes the victim of one after another in a chain of black people in this book, including her own mother and father, who have been twisted and perverted by the false, empty, and often vicious standards of the white world. (The "humiliations, defeats, and emasculations" of her father are described in one long, almost expressionistic sequence that culminates in his rape of Pecola, an act described as a manifestation both of hatred and of a love horribly distorted by inchoate wretchedness.)

Much of the novel is narrated by another black child, Claudia MacTeer, whose family is poor, harried, and struggling, but basically stable and loving. The voice of this sassy, bright black girl renders the texture and details of her existence with curiosity, freshness, astringency, and humor. But at the end of the novel, a more mature Claudia indicts the entire black community for its part in Pecola's degradation, for failing to love her and instead despising her for her extreme poverty and ugliness.

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The strengths of *The Bluest Eye* —purity of language, economy of structure, strong narrative voice, and a sensitive yet surgical delineation of some of the miseries of black life—in some measure compensate for many of its weaknesses, which include an insistence on an ethic of total victimization and a sometimes relentless pathos. But the virtues cannot overcome the flaws in the novel's vision. Miss Morrison crudely manipulates the assignment of judgment and blame in this book, refusing to transcend black and white as categories of good and evil. The icy scorn she levels at the black middle class, especially exemplified in a certain type of black woman who destroys her natural "funkiness" in the interest of "thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners," is itself but a variant of her scorn for the white world, whence such falsely "good" values supposedly derive. Instead of exploring the universal theme which she herself has set into play—the fatal and terrifying lapses of love in the human heart —Miss Morrison sticks doggedly to her shallow dichotomies.

The Bluest Eye is hardly the only place where Miss Morrison has registered her objection to the "push toward middle-class respectability" in which blacks have "abandoned the past and a lot of the truth and sustenance that went with it." To be sure, such sentiments often go hand-in-hand with complaints of a different nature against the black-is-beautiful idea —which is to say that Miss Morrison's feelings on this matter are somewhat complicated, if not downright contradictory. There is, for example, a strain in her thought which seems not only not to condemn but even to endorse certain pathological elements in black life, in an echo, ironic to say the least, of Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro."

Thus, remarking on the "tremendous possibility for masculinity among black men," Miss Morrison concedes that "They may end up in sort of 20th-century, contemporary terms being also unemployed. They may be in prison." But, she insists, "they are adventuresome." Of what is "described as a major failing of black men—they do not stay home and take care of their children"—she observes that "that has always been to me one of the most attractive features about black male life . . . the fact that they would split in a minute just delights me. It's part of that whole business of breaking ground." And in general, she observes:

> This special lack of restraint, which is a part of human life and is best typified in certain black males, is of particular interest to me. It's in black men despite the reasons society says they're not supposed to have it. Everybody knows who "that man" is, and they may give him bad names and call him a "street nigger"; but when you take away the vocabulary of denigration, what you have is somebody who is fearless and who is comfortable with that fearlessness. It's not about meanness. It's a kind of self-flagellant resistance to certain kinds of control, which is fascinating. Opposed to accepted notions of progress, the lock-step life, they live in the world unreconstructed and that's it.

An ingrained repugnance for the "lock-step" life and a steady if formless fascination with the "unreconstructed" are a frequent motif in Miss Morrison's work, and they inform the structure of her second novel, *Sula*. Here she traces the lives and families of two black women, from their close childhood friendship to their estranged maturity.

Nel Wright is the offspring of a black woman who has ironed out all the wildness of her nature and of her part-Creole background in order to achieve a tight, starched refinement. Sula Peace comes from a "woolly house" of many rooms in which the restraints of the civilized world are very thin. Sula's grandmother, Eva, abandoned with three small children years before by her young husband, is an ambiguous figure who is shown to be capable of devotion but who sets her grown son Plum afire in his bed rather than witness his drug-induced deterioration. Eva's daughter and Sula's mother, Hannah, is a beautiful, sensuous widow who keeps a steady sequence of lovers, "mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors." Sula's own life is cut loose from any moorings when she overhears her mother's remark to friends that she loves her daughter but does not like her, and when she herself carelessly but unintentionally causes the drowning of a local boy. "The first experience taught her that there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either."

Nel takes the traditional route of marriage and family while Sula goes on to college, travel, sex, and a quest "to make myself." When she returns to town years later she puts her grandmother Eva in a wretched old folks' home, indulges in casual promiscuity, and offhandedly seduces and discards Jude, Nel's husband, thereby wrecking the marriage. Sula begins to feel the pull of possessive love herself when she falls for the smooth, sexy Ajax, but he departs the moment he detects the "scent of the nest." Nel never remarries but lives a dry, lonely, duty-filled existence until, years later and long after Sula's death at the age of thirty, she realizes that her unhappiness stems from missing not Jude, with whom she had a relationship of mutual dependency, but Sula, who alone aroused in her the "sparkle or splutter" of her nature, the richer, deeper potential of her unfulfilled character.

Some critics have balked at the sensational level of physical and emotional violence in *Sula*, but what is really disturbing is the author's determination to take no clear stand on the appalling actions she depicts. *Sula* turns into a parody of *Wuthering Heights*, especially of its ultra-intense Latinate rendition in the film version by Luis Buñuel. Both works oppose the tamed complacencies of civilization to the raw, fanged passions of nature, but *Sula* never achieves the genuine resolution of *Wuthering Heights*. It would seem that Miss Morrison wants things both ways: although we have in *Sula* some of the trappings of a feminist novel—a matriarchy of women alone, two young black girls who have to face life in the realization that they are "neither white nor

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male," a sketch of Sula as a frustrated artist, a deliberate effort to portray female friendship—in Sula's doomed search for unconditioned freedom the novel also appears to criticize feminist doctrine. Similarly, when Ajax leaves Sula, there is a perceptible feeling of sadness at the failure of love, one of Miss Morrison's usual themes, and yet also a kind of endorsement of his right to roam and remain unattached.

Miss Morrison attempts to resolve the tensions in her novel with what amounts to an aesthetic evasion. Her horrendous portrait of people cutting and bruising and burning each other and themselves in fits and flails of wild, thoughtless willfulness ends with Nel's sudden belated awareness of her love for Sula. But even if a proper union of their differing temperaments could have occurred, how would that heal, dispel, balance, offset, or even make comprehensible the frightening picture of black life that Miss Morrison has presented? The moral issues the novel raises are left hanging, not so much unanswered as answered in a number of self-canceling or mutually canceling ways.

In *Song of Solomon*, Miss Morrison at last permits herself to work her material through, and the novel, although more diffuse than the tightly crafted *Sula*, is more satisfying. Macon Dead II is the richest black man in his Michigan town ("Own things," is his motto), but so empty is life in his company that his wife gains her pleasure by nursing their youngest child Macon III until he is four years old, thus earning him the nickname Milkman. Macon II has a sister, Pilate, poor but independent, uneducated but wise in the deep things of life, in touch with all that her brother has left behind of their strange, sad, eventful childhood. In her dark, pleasantly odorous, and cluttered shack, where she lives with her daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar, Milkman begins to discover the richer and more remote dimensions of black life that his father has drained from their home.

Increasingly dissatisfied with his soft, limited life and his dependency on his father (who, as bad as he is, is nevertheless portrayed with a degree of sympathy), Milkman decides to set out on a search through the South for a purported bag of gold that is connected to his father's and Pilate's childhood, and which he hopes will make him more independent. He soon realizes that he is really on a search for his family history, which is a far greater treasure, full of strength and joy as well as suffering and pain. This quest in turn becomes a spiritual journey of great energy, depth, and exhilaration as Milkman learns for the first time of the underlying coherence of life, the capacities and contingencies of human existence.

As in classical quest myths, Milkman's journey requires him to face danger and loss and hardship and progressively to shed the trappings of his former life. He must learn to know and respect a wide assortment of black people, including many he would once have arrogantly overlooked. Through various depredations, he comes to empathize with his mother, his neglected sisters, and his cousin Hagar whom he had carelessly discarded after a twelve-year affair.

In a sense Milkman is like Sula, unable at first to understand or to trust the fitful patterns of love and hate, involvement and abandonment that seem to inform human relationships; but unlike Sula he is allowed to work beyond this, as what he learns of his past gradually illumines and orders his present. Milkman's ability to see imaginatively into other people's lives grows greater and greater as his self-regard dissolves. When his aunt Pilate murmurs her last words—"I wish I'd a knowed more people, I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more"—he is able to comprehend at last the nature of such a generous, unconditional love and to be moved by it to the threshold of genuine attachment himself.

Song of Solomon has its flaws—some sections remain flat, and there is some undigested protest—but the line of Milkman's journey is quite pure. To this point in her career Miss Morrison had not shown much real interest in the spiritual dimension that the Bible has brought to black life, beyond using its bountiful, sonorous names for her characters, or beyond the occasional indictment of Christian values for stunting and distorting lives. And *Song of Solomon*, despite its biblical title, is itself constructed not as a Christian tale but out of the folklore of slavery. Still, at the end of the hero's quest he has clearly learned that he who loses his life shall save it—or as Milkman puts it, "If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it."

In her next work, *Tar Baby*, a racist novel designed to show the natural superiority of blacks, Miss Morrison, as if running from the expansive implications of *Song of Solomon*, returns to all her crabby grievances with a vengeance. Worse, since *Tar Baby* is the only one of her novels largely set in the present, it is deprived of the narrative energy that is released in her when she is dealing with the more exotic black characters and environments of previous decades.

Set in a splendid house on an isolated Caribbean island, *Tar Baby* has the trappings of those erotically charged women's novels in which frigid, raven-haired beauties are surprised in their bedrooms by dark sensual men who pin their wrists together and startle them into a troubled awareness of their unsatisfied longings. In fact, the frigid raven-haired heroine of *Tar Baby*, appropriately named Jadine, *is* surprised in her bedroom by a sensual black man who pins her wrists together and startles her into a troubled awareness of her unsatisfied longings. This embarrassing book is hardly worth discussing save to note that it asserts once again the need for blacks to keep themselves unspotted from the white world and leaves its hero, Son, with the choice of chasing after the irredeemably white-tainted Jadine or of returning to his primitive black past, even more amorphously presented here than ever before in Miss Morrison's novels.

Now, in her latest novel, *Beloved*, Miss Morrison turns back to the history of slavery. Set near Cincin-

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nati around 1873, *Beloved* chronicles the fortunes of Sethe, once a slave on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky. Sethe and her husband had belonged to a "good" master—one who treated his property well—but on the pattern of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they had come at their master's death under the charge of a singularly cruel man known only as schoolteacher [*sic*].

Because of gross mistreatment, a number of the Sweet Home slaves plan to escape. Sethe sends her three children ahead, then gets through herself after great hardship. A child is born to her en route with the assistance of a poor white girl after whom the baby is named, Denver. Sethe's husband Halle fails to join her; later she discovers that, shortly before he was to leave, his spirit had been broken when he secretly witnessed her being forced by schoolteacher to give her milk to grown white boys. Sethe attempts to make a life for herself with her husband's mother, Baby Suggs, a strong, big-hearted woman who becomes an "unchurched preacher," telling her fellow blacks that they must learn to love themselves in a world where no one else does. But finally Baby Suggs's sorrows overcome her; she announces one day that "there was no bad luck in the world but white-folks," takes to her bed, and begins slowly to die.

Suspended in her own grief, Sethe stays on in the house with Denver, a withdrawn and lonely child. The house is haunted by the ghost of "Beloved," a baby daughter Sethe had killed one month into freedom in the mistaken belief that she and her children were all about to be dragged back into slavery. When another former Sweet Home slave by the name of Paul D arrives, gets rid of the ghost, and begins to take up life with Sethe and Denver, Sethe almost lets herself believe that happiness is possible. But then the ghost returns in the flesh as a young woman at the age she would have been had the baby lived. The reunion with Beloved is at first joyous, but soon she turns malevolent, destroying whatever life Sethe and Denver have made, and contributing to Paul D's departure. Finally Denver seeks help, the now-pregnant Beloved is finally exorcised by a group of neighborhood women, Denver begins life anew, and Paul D returns to Sethe in a spirit of love and acceptance.

THERE are many compelling elements in *Beloved*, including the delineation of the psychological and emotional effects of being owned—of having no sense of self, of fearing to trust or to love when anything can be taken away at any time. The portrayal of the very limited consciousness of the slaves and ex-slaves, and of their painful slow growth toward damaged self-awareness, is also effective, although sometimes the halt and hesitant nature of their thoughts makes the novel almost catatonic. A couple of scenes in which Sethe begins to feel the rush of life are well and affectingly done.

But the book grows massive and heavy with cumulative and oft-repeated miseries, with new miseries and new dimensions of miseries added in each telling and retelling long after the point has been made and the reader has grown numb. The graphic descriptions of physical humiliation begin to grow sensationalistic, and the gradual unfolding of secret horror has an unmistakably Gothic dimension which soon comes to seem merely lurid, designed to arouse and entertain.

Still, while far from successful as a work of art, *Beloved* is fascinating to view in the progression of Toni Morrison's work, in which a tropism for simplistic plight-and-protest has done fitful battle with the more capacious demands of a functioning moral imagination. True, Miss Morrison does not display a really sure hand in her treatment of the moral dimensions of Sethe's initial act of child murder, yet unlike the almost offhand treatment of similar crimes in *Sula*, she does make the deed stand as a matter of great gravity and consequence. Sethe is defiant about what she has done, but then later on she must undergo the trial of Beloved's return and vengeance, must suffer the torment involved in confronting and overcoming the past, before she can be free to live. Interesting too is the way in which *Beloved* can almost be read as Miss Morrison's own effort to exorcise the burden of history, to be free in her work of what Howe called the "defining and crippling" violence that has been the subject of the black protest novel.

But Miss Morrison seems simply unsure how much she wants the past, which means both the immediate past and the historical past, to weigh in the lives and behavior of her characters. She cannot quite accept the standard of freedom held out by Ralph Ellison but neither is she satisfied with the determinism of a Richard Wright. And while she is caught between these two stools, the fantastical, sensational elements in her work often come to look like artistic evasions.

Irving Howe wrote in his response to Ellison that James Baldwin "did score a major point: the posture of militancy, no matter how great the need for it, exacts a heavy price from the writer. . . . All one can ask, by way of reply, is whether the refusal of struggle may not exact a still greater price." But the shape of Toni Morrison's work suggests that the passage of two eventful decades may have reversed the terms of this formulation. Letting go of protest and militancy exacts a price, but the price of holding on to them may be greater still.

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Inside Out

VEIL: THE SECRET WARS OF THE CIA 1981-1987. By BOB WOODWARD. *Simon & Schuster. 543 pp. $21.95.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL LEDEEN

DESPITE the near-total lack of documentation for most of Bob Woodward's tales in this book about the CIA under the directorship of the late William J. Casey, *Veil* has been widely praised as an insider's account of the secret activities of the Reagan administration. But *Veil* is not an inside story; it is at best an "inside-the-locker-room" story, full of the vulgar language and pseudo-informed gossip that one finds among middle-level bureaucrats pretending to know "what really happened." Woodward's claims to the contrary notwithstanding, it is also hard to believe that interviews with Casey had much to do with the writing of *Veil*, not simply because of the late CIA Director's well-known contempt for Woodward and Woodward's newspaper, the Washington *Post*, but also because of the startling lack of any informed understanding of international affairs that characterizes this book. Had Casey really spent a lot of time with Woodward, at least some of the events described in *Veil* would have received a decent analysis.

Veil is in essence an extended attack upon Casey and those few other officials in the American government during the Reagan years who were interested in pursuing an activist foreign policy. To be sure, Woodward is canny enough to avoid a direct assault on Casey and his friends and supporters, preferring instead to place adverse judgments of them in the minds of various other protagonists in this book. But Woodward does have a clear, consistent view of American foreign policy which informs and directs his account: any serious attempt to challenge our enemies is bound to be misguided.

Woodward's heroes are those who share this view inside Congress and the Agency itself, the "professionals" who fought against efforts by Casey and a handful of his associates to conduct a forceful and determined anti-Soviet foreign policy. As for foreign leaders who allied themselves with the purposes of the Reagan administration, in Woodward's telling they acted either out of misplaced ideological zeal or because the CIA paid them off. In their number Woodward does not hesitate to include the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat; the current President of El Salvador, José Napoleon Duarte; and the current Prime Minister of Dominica, Eugenia Charles—each of whom, he claims, received CIA money and became a CIA "asset."

Yet in a maneuver typical of his presentation throughout, no sooner does Woodward plant this idea in the mind of the reader than he disingenuously steps away from it. Thus, of Duarte we learn:

> He was listed in the files as a CIA asset with a coded cryptonym. CIA assets run from "casual informants" who might not know they are giving information to the CIA, to the full-blown "controlled assets," who are paid and directed by the CIA. There is a broad gap in between, which is where Duarte fit. He had been a good source of intelligence over many years, but he was a man of independence who was in no sense controlled and may not have known he was giving information to the CIA. . . .

What one concludes from this is that Duarte was in fact not in the "broad gap" at all but was rather a "casual informant"—in other words, one who sometimes spoke to persons who were working for the CIA. Woodward's use of the term "assets," one of those little conceits that the CIA itself employs to give its reports enhanced credibility, simply works to thicken the cloud of aspersion around Duarte.

Similarly with the others. Eugenia Charles's government had received "$100,000 for a secret support operation." Was the money itself the support operation, or were the funds to have been rerouted to someone else? Woodward does not say, and in any case Mrs. Charles has denied knowledge of the payments. Woodward, however, goes on to savage the Dominican leader —whose major sin, it will be recalled, was to have encouraged the American liberation of Grenada— and he does so, typically, through the eyes and the hidden thoughts of another participant (in this case former Assistant Secretary of State Langhorne Motley).

Sadat receives the same treatment:

> Broadly speaking, Sadat was an intelligence asset, not directly in the pay of the CIA, not in any sense under its control, but he had opened himself and his country, in his definition of their mutual self-interest, to the CIA.

First the scarlet brand ("A" for "asset"), then the tricky disclaimer. By such means does Woodward denigrate three courageous leaders who at no small risk to themselves joined with the United States to fight the spread of Soviet influence in their regions.

The habit of insinuating that supporters of the U.S. are intelligence "assets" and then immediately stripping the term of any substantial meaning exemplifies a pattern that runs throughout *Veil*, permitting the author to make damaging charges and then, where convenient, to deny that he has made them. The larger pattern can be seen at work in the case of our relations with Central America. Thus, for the first part of the book, Woodward repeatedly deprecates the claim made by William Casey that a substantial flow of arms was going from the Sandinista regime

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of Nicaragua to the Communist guerrillas fighting against the Duarte government in El Salvador; there was, according to Woodward, no intelligence to justify such a claim. Then for the balance of the book Woodward wonders why Casey, the CIA, and the Reagan administration at large failed to stop the arms shipments.

But the fact is—and Woodward's sources had to have known it—that the intelligence community possessed detailed information about the shipment of weapons from Nicaragua to El Salvador beginning in the final years of the Carter administration. By late 1981 it was known not only that Nicaragua, under Cuban direction, was supplying the Communist guerrillas in El Salvador with weapons, but that the day-to-day conduct of the war in El Salvador was being run from Managua. There was an intense struggle within the administration between CIA professionals—who wanted to keep the bulk of the evidence secret, on the grounds that to reveal it would jeopardize sources and methods—and those who wanted to bring it to the attention of the public and so convince a skeptical nation that the administration's concerns were solidly grounded in fact and not the result of blind ideological opposition to the Sandinistas and their foreign sponsors.

It is embarrassing that Woodward should be ignorant of this internal debate, in which the abundance and accuracy of the basic information were not challenged by either side. But then he appears no less ignorant of the public record, writing for instance that President Carter in 1980 "had been on the brink of pulling the plug on the U.S. assistance" to Nicaragua but neglecting to add that Carter did in fact pull the plug, suspending American aid in January 1981. It was Woodward's nemesis, the Reagan administration, which restored the aid shortly after taking office.

Woodward also chooses his information carefully. He tells of the discovery, in 1980, of a considerable quantity of documents belonging to Shafik Handal, the head of the Salvadoran Communist party. These documents, as Woodward writes, showed frequent travel "to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, other Soviet-bloc countries and Cuba; agreements had been reached on ammunition and medical supplies to be shipped through Cuba and Nicaragua. . . ." Yet other documents found at the same time, and not mentioned by Woodward, showed how Castro had ordered Handal to form a unified guerrilla movement in Salvador, so that the Cubans could direct all the anti-government forces. And there were still other documents that had belonged to Farid Handal, Shafik's brother, and which told of travel to the United States where Farid Handal met with American Communists and their sympathizers in Washington, New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles to raise money for the Salvadoran guerrillas and to organize a propaganda campaign inside the United States to combat the government's efforts to support Duarte.

It would not have been difficult for Woodward to lay his hands on this documentation, for it was declassified and released to the public in February 1981. Yet there is not a word about any of it in *Veil*—just as, when it comes to Grenada, there is no sign that Woodward has studied the vast documentation on that country under Communist rule that is available to the public in the National Archives. (Indeed, again contrary to documented fact, Woodward denies that Cuban military officers were present in Grenada.)

Once upon a time, Woodward and his then-colleague, Carl Bernstein, proclaimed they would not publish anything without having at least two good sources for it. That frail reed is now gone; *Veil* frequently rests upon single sources that are clearly unreliable.

In this connection there is a revealing sequence dealing with Woodward's efforts to prove that Israel was giving covert financial support to the Nicaraguan *contras*. After unsuccessfully trying to get someone in a position of authority to confirm the idea, Woodward finally uncovers a single "well-placed Israeli source" who speaks in gnomic terms:

> Like the private matters that can take place between two individuals, there are things, shadowy, unreadable, that can and do take place between two nations that remain out of view. It defies interpretation and will not stand illumination. But it was true, though there could be no details. He did not know the details himself.

To which a reader is entitled to respond, if the source did not know any details, how could he say his information was nonetheless true? Woodward, in fact, asks this question, and gets the reply:

> There are truths that need no details, he said. For example, Israel sells arms to Honduras . . . the answer could be there. . . .

Well, was the answer there? Responds the gnomic Israeli: "I doubt it. . . ."

Armed with this "information," the Washington *Post* reported at the time that Israel was giving money to the *contras*, a charge categorically denied by the Israeli government and also by the CIA, whose spokesman George Lauder told Woodward explicitly that the CIA had not requested any *contra* money from the Israelis. Casey himself told Woodward that there had been no official contacts between anyone at the Agency and the Israelis on that subject.

In short, on the basis of a single source that would be laughed out of any serious newsroom, and three denials that the episode in question took place, Woodward writes about it as if he had proved his point beyond a shadow of doubt.

If preposterous sources are taken seriously—when they can be used to throw dirt on America and its allies—solid information detrimental to our enemies is ignored or written off. This is the case with Woodward's treatment of the Soviet role in international terrorism, an early cause of former Secretary of State Alexander Haig (for whom I later worked as a special adviser).

Haig in 1981 asked the American intelligence community to produce

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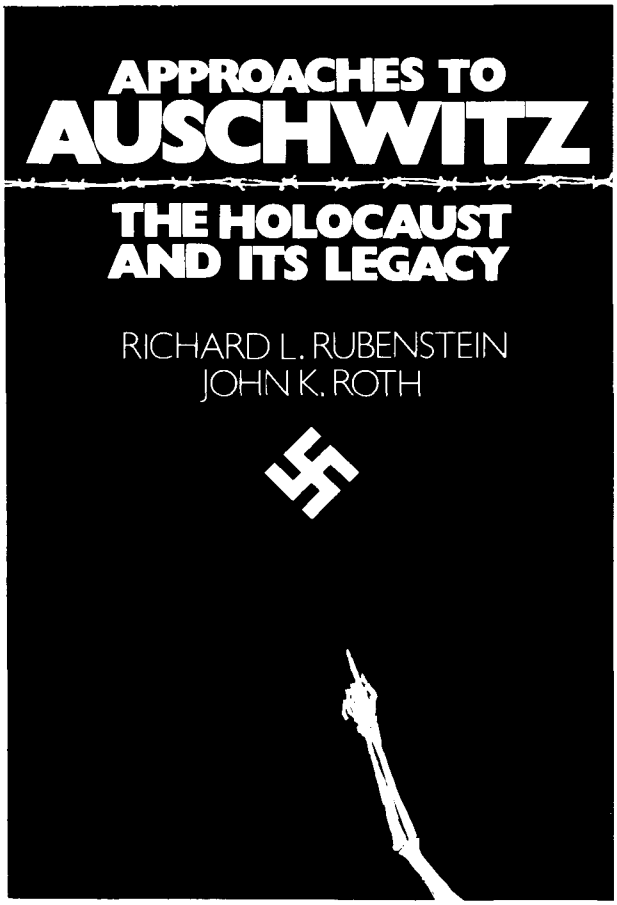

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all available information on the Soviet connection to terror. There were many in the CIA who regarded this request as a threat, since the Agency had for many years stated categorically that there was no such connection. In part this belief was due to a genuine lack of good information (after the massive leakage of secrets in the mid-70's, many allied services drastically reduced the quantity of sensitive intelligence passed to the United States government), in part to a refusal to accept evidence contrary to conventional wisdom. CIA analysts had resorted to a variety of means of denying the Soviet link, for example by declining to define the PLO (many of whose "fighters" were trained in the Soviet Union itself) as a terrorist organization or to accept the testimony of at least two very high-level defectors, General Jan Sejna of Czechoslovakia and General Ian Pacepa of Rumania, both of whom had provided firsthand knowledge of Soviet support of international terrorism.

Haig, who had himself been the target of a terrorist attack while serving in Europe as the head of NATO, had learned from several chiefs of West European intelligence services of hard evidence concerning the Soviet connection, and he assumed that this information had been passed to the CIA. Instead, the CIA—along with leading officials in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research—did everything possible to discredit the idea, and also launched an all-out assault on Claire Sterling's book, *The Terror Network*, which detailed the considerable Soviet involvement. The debate was intense, but Woodward gives us only half of the story; he takes the anti-Haig and anti-Sterling remarks as gospel and dismisses all arguments to the contrary. And he writes, almost incredibly: "As far as the American public was concerned, the Soviets still stood publicly branded by the Secretary of State as active supporters of terrorism. And the record was never corrected." Rightly so, since not one but two Secretaries of State (first Haig, then Shultz), as well as the United States Congress, have concluded on the basis of a mountain of evidence—including evidence provided by the CIA itself—that the Soviet Union supports international terrorism.

This is not the only occasion in *Veil* on which the Soviet Union and its allies are treated with kid gloves. Indeed, with all his vaunted sources, and with all his investigative talents, it is a wonder that Bob Woodward has not managed to come up with anything to tell us about KGB activities in the West, aside from a few tidbits about Soviet penetration of the American intelligence community (a revelation that damages American prestige, not that of the Soviet Union).

IN PLACING the responsibility for international conflict on Americans such as William Casey, Woodward even finds a way to blame the activities of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi on American behavior—in this case on an alleged CIA "disinformation" operation, code-named *Veil*. (In fact, *Veil* is not a CIA codeword, so even the title of this book is inaccurate.)

According to Woodward, the American government in 1986 put out false information suggesting that Qaddafi was planning new terrorist actions, and this "disinformation" campaign was in turn partly responsible for subsequent terrorist acts by Libya. Yet the article in the *Wall Street Journal* to which Woodward points as a major example of this "disinformation" was correct on every central point: the American government did in fact have intelligence about impending Libyan-sponsored terrorism, and did plan a reaction to it more vigorous than our earlier bombing of Tripoli and Bengazi. Moreover, the act of Libyan terrorism to which *Veil* refers (in Karachi, Pakistan) was in the planning stage well before the *Wall Street Journal* article appeared.

The notion that Western democracies are somehow responsible for the anti-democratic or terroristic behavior of their enemies, which would cease if only the West pursued a more placatory course in foreign policy, is a mainstay of the systematic distortion of reality to which Woodward has so energetically contributed, both in this book and elsewhere. What is shocking in all this is not so much his view of the world as his loose way with the facts, and with what may legitimately be inferred from the facts. For here after all lies the final test of a journalist's reliability.

THIS brings us to the two widely-reported melodramatic claims that have featured prominently in all the hype surrounding *Veil*: first, that William Casey arranged with the Saudis to attempt the assassination of Shi'ite leader Sheikh Mohammed Hossein Fadlallah in Lebanon in 1985; second, that Woodward gained access to Casey's hospital room in the Director's "final days," and had a conversation in which Casey confirmed having known about the diversion of funds from the Iran initiative to the *contras*, and said, in explanation, "I believed."

It is highly unlikely that Casey and the Saudis wanted Fadlallah eliminated. For one thing, Woodward's statement that both Casey and Saudi Ambassador Bandar "knew that the chief supporter and symbol of terrorism was the fundamentalist leader Sheikh Fadlallah" is wrong. No serious analyst would label Fadlallah the "chief supporter and symbol of terrorism"; he was one of many such figures, and his importance was primarily political. Moreover, it stretches credibility to suggest that the Saudi royal family would have been willing to act so vigorously against Shi'ites inside Lebanon—where they hardly threatened Saudi interests—when it showed little inclination to deal aggressively with Shi'ite terrorism against the monarchy itself inside Saudi Arabia. So at a minimum Woodward's ascribed "motive" is unconvincing; and, as usual, there is no evidence to support Woodward's account of a conversation between two people—Casey and Bandar—one of whom is dead and the other of whom denies it.

The near-miraculous conversation in Georgetown University hospital is even less credible. Casey's doctors and family have said that he was incapable of coherent speech. Charles Colson, who underwent surgery in Georgetown at the

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same time, visited Casey in that period and found that verbal communication was impossible. Moreover, when Woodward was asked by Ted Koppel on *Nightline* to describe something about the hospital room, or whether Casey was on a life-support system, or attached to an intravenous tube, he refused to answer. His grounds were that to do so would jeopardize his sources, but as Koppel justly commented, "I'm not exactly sure I understand why a description of the Director's condition at that point would point a finger in anyone's direction." Finally, it is interesting, to put it mildly, that Woodward's editors at the Washington *Post* did not feel that his account of the conversation was newsworthy, and turned it down for publication.

Readers will have to make up their own minds about Woodward's integrity, but it may help to remember that this is the man who, with Carl Bernstein, reported at length on the activities and even the innermost thoughts of H.R. Haldeman *in Washington* during a period of time when Haldeman was in California, and that the late John Osborne, who covered the White House with such distinction for the *New Republic*, called their book *The Final Days* "the worst job of nationally noted reporting that I've observed during 49 years in the business."

Whether or not *Veil* succeeds in its intention of discrediting William Casey and what he stood for, it is bound to have a wider effect of which Woodward can hardly be unaware. That a journalist *appears* to have obtained, and published, some of the most intimate secrets of the American government, whether they are accurate or not, will be sufficient to dissuade many real and potential friends from sharing their knowledge with us. Woodward claims that he has taken care not to disclose details of ongoing operations (as if this were the point), and that anyway the truth must be known, even if it hurts. We can all salute a dedicated truth-seeker, but the author of *Veil* is not entitled to the label. Had he been interested in the truth, he would have written a book which respects it.

A Life in Music

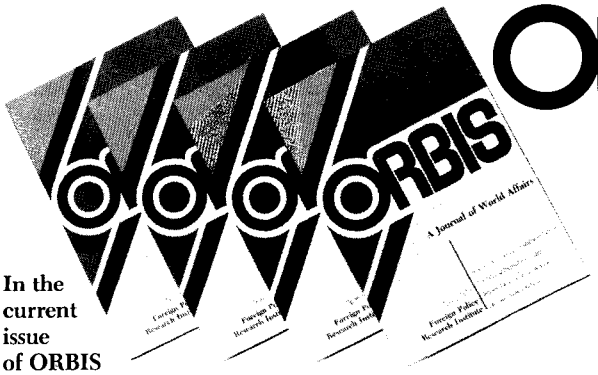
GERSHWIN. By EDWARD JABLONSKI. *Doubleday. 436 pp. $21.95.*

Reviewed by
WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

IT IS probably fair to say that George Gershwin (1898-1937) was the most famous American musical figure of his brief time. He died before reaching his thirty-ninth birthday, and did not achieve celebrity until 1924, wth the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*—though the date could perhaps be pushed back to 1922, when Paul Whiteman recorded "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise," or even to 1920, when Al Jolson recorded "Swanee." In any case, it was only for about fifteen years (give or take a couple) that Gershwin was before the public. Yet at the time of his death, probably fifty to a hundred of his songs, his handful of concert works, and portions of his opera *Porgy and Bess* were known throughout the world, and he was widely regarded as this country's most important and representative 20th-century composer.

But until now there has been no biography that did him justice. Isaac Goldberg's 1931 *George Gershwin* is valuable because Goldberg had Gershwin's cooperation, but is wildly idolatrous. David Ewen's 1970 *George Gershwin—His Journey to Greatness* is fanciful and riddled with errors. The first really serious biography, Charles Schwartz's *Gershwin: His Life and Music*, did not appear until 1973. Though it contains much valuable new research and some insightful analysis, it is a compulsively mean-spirited book. Despite his obvious admiration for Gershwin's music, Schwartz seems determined to show that the man (and the composer) was not all he seemed (or was cracked up) to be. Again and again he portrays Gershwin as naive, ignorant, anti-intellectual,

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN *teaches English at Boston College and writes on music for the* Atlantic *and* Fanfare.



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boorish, egotistical, manipulative, and pushy. (This last accusation, I might add, is especially hard for a reader to swallow, coming as it does from a biographer who saw fit to introduce into his book two utterly irrelevant photographs of himself, one with Nadia Boulanger and the other with Duke Ellington, neither of whom was a figure of any importance in Gershwin's life.) As Schwartz tells it, Gershwin was an unholy mix of roué and prig, and the energy, vitality, and warmth that so impressed those who actually knew him were merely an "outer shell" that concealed a seething mass of insecurities and some rather nasty obsessions.

It is a great pleasure to be able to report that in Edward Jablonski, Gershwin has at last found the biographer he has so long needed and deserved. To anyone who knows *The Gershwin Years*, which Jablonski wrote in collaboration with Lawrence D. Stewart, for many years Ira Gershwin's secretary, this will come as no surprise. Though too loose and informal to be counted as a full-dress biography, *The Gershwin Years*, which was first published in 1958 and then republished in a revised edition in 1973, is a thoroughly delightful book that gives a fascinating and comprehensive picture of the era suggested by its title. This new book is both narrower in scope and far denser in its factual coverage of Gershwin's life. Unless some startling new information comes to light, it is hard to see why Gershwin will ever need another biography.

Though Jablonski's book has been generally well received, some reviewers have expressed disappointment that he did not attempt to delve more deeply into Gershwin's psyche, to ferret out the causes of the tremendous drive that produced all that wonderful music in those few years. It seems to me, however, that Jablonski's steadfast refusal to put his subject —dead now half a century—on the couch, and to speculate about sources, motives, and causes beyond what the written and spoken record warrants, is one of the great strengths of his book. We have recently been treated to biographies of Louis Armstrong and Leonard Bernstein that dwell tediously and fruitlessly on their subjects' alleged respective searches for father-figures; it is a great relief to have this book on Gershwin that simply —though it was of course no simple task—weaves together the external facts of his extraordinary career with the testimony of so many people who knew and worked with him.

It is, however, worth pointing out that Schwartz's distastefully skewed depiction of Gershwin has other sources (or at least precedents) besides the common biographer's itch to make himself appear more wholesome than his subject. For despite Gershwin's enormous popular success—or, rather, because of the peculiar nature of that success—his career and reputation were under something of a cloud during most of his creative life, and even after his death. We Americans love to think of ourselves as free and adventurous, experimental, not bound by the rigid categories of the Old World. And nowhere is this more true than in the arts. Yet it was precisely the apparent ease with which Gershwin moved back and forth between the musical theater and the concert stage, from popular songs to extended concert works and finally into opera, that troubled and annoyed his contemporaries—and especially his American, as opposed to his European, contemporaries.

The trouble began with the famous Aeolian Hall concert of February 12, 1924, at which Whiteman premiered *Rhapsody in Blue*, with Gershwin at the piano. Accustomed as he was to the ways of the musical theater, and being relatively inexperienced at orchestration, Gershwin left the job of scoring the *Rhapsody* to Ferde Grofé, who was then Whiteman's chief arranger. This now seems a small matter, hardly worth mentioning, but then it seemed very important indeed.

So long as Gershwin confined himself to writing songs and the scores for musical shows, he could be safely ignored by the American musical establishment. But the instantly and immensely successful *Rhapsody* was something else again. For the leaders of that establishment, men like Daniel Gregory Mason and Edward Burlingame Hill, who headed the music departments at Columbia and Harvard respectively, had it all planned out that America would find its authentic musical voice in the works of composers like themselves, composers who came of Anglo-Saxon stock, had attended Ivy League colleges, and had gone on to conservatory training under European masters. To them, Gershwin's successful bid for recognition as a serious composer was not only an affront but also a threat. Mason wrote of the "insidiousness of the Jewish menace to our artistic integrity," and deplored the fact that "our whole contemporary attitude toward instrumental music, especially in New York, is dominated by Jewish tastes and standards, with their Oriental extravagance, their sensuous brilliancy and intellectual facility and superficiality, their general tendency to exaggeration and disproportion." There had to be some way of proving that a Jewish song-plugger from the Lower East Side who had come up through the Tin Pan Alley ranks with little or no formal training was a fraud. Thus the fact that the musically more respectable Grofé had orchestrated *Rhapsody in Blue* was eagerly seized upon as evidence that he had probably had a hand in its composition as well.

Gershwin, who had a sizable ego, was understandably stung by these rumors. He therefore resolved that from then on he would orchestrate all his concert works himself—though still leaving the scoring of his shows to others. But shortly after the premiere of his *Concerto in F*, which took place at Carnegie Hall on December 3, 1925, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony and Gershwin again at the piano, the rumors came out into the open.

In the September 1926 issue of the magazine *Singing*, the composer A. Walter Kramer, who had served as editor of *Musical America* and had studied abroad with the Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero, contrasted the world of classical music, in which "com-

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posers do their writing for themselves," with the jazz world, in which "the composer isn't even asked to write his own scores," and added: "It is openly stated that the scoring of *Rhapsody in Blue* is Ferdie's; that the Gershwin Piano Concerto was written by him [i.e., Gershwin], but the orchestration done by someone else."

The composer Allan Lincoln Langley, who had been a student of Mason's, published a similar piece, entitled "The Gershwin Myth" in the December 1932 issue of George Jean Nathan's new magazine the *American Spectator*. In November of the same year Langley had played viola in a performance of the 1928 *An American in Paris* that Gershwin had conducted at the old Metropolitan Opera House, and he had noted what he took to be Gershwin's excessive dependence, at rehearsals, on his friend, the conductor Bill Daly. "The genial Daly," wrote Langley, "was constantly in rehearsal attendance, both as *répétiteur* and adviser, and any member of the orchestra could testify that he knew far more about the score than Gershwin." "No previous claimant of honors in symphonic composition," Langley concluded, "has ever presented so much argument and so much controversy as to whether his work was his own or not."

Finally, it became known after the 1935 premiere of *Porgy and Bess* that since 1932 Gershwin had been studying with the theorist Joseph Schillinger. And so this time it was Schillinger—rather than Grofé or Damrosch or Daly—who got the credit for having done for Gershwin what he obviously, being who he was, could not have done for himself.

THROUGHOUT most of his career, then, Gershwin was damned if he did and damned if he didn't. Either he was a musical illiterate who had blundered alone into the world of serious music or—more likely, considering his success and his ethnic background—he had craftily got others to do his work for him. That it was perfectly possible for so gifted a man to cross the line from Broadway to Carnegie Hall was, to many of his most influential contemporaries, simply inconceivable. Even Schwartz, in his biography, gives some credence to the rumors.

But of course the plain truth, as Jablonski clearly shows, is that Gershwin did it on his own. Not only is there the testimony of his friends and of his sketches and manuscript scores, now in the Library of Congress; there is also the fact that no other explanation makes any psychological sense. Gershwin was not only a fiercely ambitious man but a very proud one as well, sure from an early age of the magnitude of his gift. One day in 1919, when he was confiding some of his future plans to his fellow pianist Abram Chasins, Chasins suggested that he take some lessons from Rubin Goldmark, who was later to teach at Juilliard. Gershwin glared at him and angrily replied: "You're just the kind of person who's keeping me from my great work!" The more successful he became, the more his reputation as a serious composer mattered to him. Surely he would no more have compromised his sense of himself by depending unduly upon others than he would have run the risk of having the dependency somehow come to light.

One of the many virtues of Jablonski's book is that it shows just how much time Gershwin managed to find, throughout his incredibly busy creative life, to devote to the serious study of music. In his mid-teens he began taking piano lessons from one Charles Hambitzer, who introduced him to Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy, and, as Gershwin later put it, "made me harmony conscious." When he expressed an interest in studying theory, Hambitzer recommended Edward Kilenyi, who had studied with Pietro Mascagni in Rome and with Mason at Columbia, where he had earned a Ph.D.—something of a rarity in those days. Gershwin's studies with Kilenyi seem to have lasted from 1919 to 1921. In the summer of 1921 he took a course in orchestration at Columbia, and in 1923 he did indeed try studying with Goldmark, but the two men did not get on.

In the meantime Gershwin had served his Tin Pan Alley apprenticeship as a song-plugger at Remick's (1914-17) and, in 1918, had graduated to the post of songwriter at Harms, who then became his regular publisher. Jolson had made his famous record of "Swanee," and George White had asked Gershwin to provide music for his annual *George White's Scandals*, an arrangement that lasted from 1920 through 1924. The collaboration with his lyricist brother Ira (1896-1983) had got under way, and by the mid-1920's the two Gershwins were turning out show scores at the rate of one or two a year for the likes of Fred and Adele Astaire (*Lady Be Good!*, *Funny Face*), Gertrude Lawrence (*Oh, Kay!*, *Treasure Girl*), and Marilyn Miller (*Rosalie*). Obviously, there was little time for directed study. In the same month that the *Concerto in F* was premiered, December 1925, two Gershwin shows, *Tip-Toes* and *Song of the Flame*, opened on Broadway.

But Gershwin kept reading and studying on his own, and attending concerts and recitals. Moreover, as Jablonski shows, once Gershwin had made his name as a theatrical composer, he again felt free to attempt serious directed study. In 1926 he composed only one show score, for *Oh, Kay!*, and spent "several months searching for a suitable teacher." During 1927 he met, at first weekly and then monthly, with the composer Henry Cowell, and probably also with the composer Wallingford Riegger and the conductor Artur Bodanzky. Early in 1928, when he was beginning work on *An American in Paris*, he had something of a breathing space: *Funny Face* and *Rosalie* were running on Broadway, and *Oh, Kay!* had moved on to London. Gershwin therefore approached Maurice Ravel, who was on a tour of this country and had asked to meet him, and later, in Paris, Nadia Boulanger. Both of them turned him down, for reasons that are not now clear.

OF COURSE there was much more to George Gershwin's life than work, and there is much more in Jablonski's book than an account

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of his studies and achievements. The constant parties, at which he often played the piano until well past dawn, are vividly remembered, and his relations with the various glamorous women whom he courted are for once put in perspective. There were not only the famous affairs with movie actresses Paulette Goddard and Simone Simon, but the far more important and long-lasting relation with his great friend Kay Swift, also a gifted songwriter. In 1934 she divorced her husband, the financier James Paul Warburg, perhaps with the thought (or hope) that she and Gershwin would marry. When he left for Hollywood in 1936, they agreed not to communicate with each other, but his letters to his friend Mabel Schirmer are filled with inquiries about Kay and with bits of news—"Have not yet found a steady girl out here"—that seem clearly intended to be passed on to her. Jablonski also uncovers a fairly serious relation with a girl named Rosamond Walling, who was twelve years Gershwin's junior.

Why did he never marry? Perhaps because his parents' marriage had not been a happy one, but more likely because, just as with his studies, he had trouble finding the time. It is revealing, and touching, that he seems to have talked of marriage most seriously only near the end, when his energy for work had been drained by the brain tumor that would kill him.

THROUGHOUT, Jablonski's attitude toward his subject, both as man and as artist, is just as a biographer's should be: sympathetic yet alertly critical. On balance, Gershwin was pretty much what he appeared to be: an enormously gifted, energetic, fun-loving, attractive man. His constant bouts with the disease he wryly dubbed "composer's stomach" were due not to some dark and deep-seated neurosis but simply to the pressure of the deadlines that he kept setting for himself in order to see how far his talents would carry him. As Jablonski's extensive and valuable coverage of the musical shows makes clear, Gershwin was an efficient and accommodating collaborator who was always willing to submit to cuts and other changes in order to get the show on the road, even when it came to cutting about a quarter of his "labor of love," *Porgy and Bess*, for its first production—a tactical error that may well have been responsible for the work's initial critical and box-office failure. Perhaps the best summary of his character cited by Jablonski comes from DuBose Heyward, author of the novel *Porgy* and co-author (with Ira) of the libretto for *Porgy and Bess*: "A young man of enormous physical and emotional vitality, who possessed the faculty of seeing himself quite impersonally and realistically, and who knew exactly what he wanted and where he was going. This characteristic put him beyond both modesty and conceit."

Ira Gershwin too is tellingly portrayed by Jablonski. His activities form a quiet running counterpoint to those of his more flamboyant brother, and there is an affectionate "Epilogue" that chronicles his achievements after George's death —mainly in order to dispel what Jablonski terms "the popular misconception" that "Ira's talent was almost totally dependent on his brother's genius." I must say that I find it hard to see how anyone could ever have thought this of the collaborator of Kurt Weill, Harold Arlen, and Vernon Duke, the man who wrote the lyrics to such songs as "Jenny," "The Man That Got Away," and "I Can't Get Started."

The one, quite minor, complaint I have to make against Jablonski's book is that it is inadequately documented. He tells us, for example, that Langley's suspicions were touched off not by anything that happened during rehearsals of *An American in Paris* but rather by Daly's rhetorically asking "Did I write that?" while he was rehearsing a suite of Gershwin tunes that he had prepared for the concert at the Met. What is the source of this information? Jablonski also tells us that Will Vodery's original, long-lost orchestration of *Blue Monday*, the mini-opera that Gershwin wrote for *George White's Scandals of 1922* (and that Whiteman later revived, in a new orches-

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PAUL MENDES-FLOHR, *editor*

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Although Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) attained great prestige in his lifetime, few among his followers carried forward his work or even fully comprehended his weighty magnum opus *The Star of Redemption*. Rosenzweig himself ironically observed, "Again and again I am amazed at how little its readers know it. Everybody thinks it is an admonition to kosher eating." Only recently have scholars begun to reexamine the depth of Rosenzweig's thinking and to reassess his important position in Jewish intellectual history.

Contributors

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tration by Grofé and with the new title *135th Street*), has now "surfaced." Where is it? Since Jablonski was aiming at a popular audience, it is understandable that he should not have wanted to pepper his pages with superscript numbers. But he could and should have given us far more extensive documentation than is contained in his bare four pages of "Notes on Sources."

IF JUSTICE has at last been done to George Gershwin's life, the same, alas, cannot be said of his works. The score of *Rhapsody in Blue* that is almost invariably performed is a dreadful, inflated "symphonic" version credited to Grofé. But the late Frank Campbell-Watson, Gershwin's music editor at Harms, told me that it had actually been cobbled together out of the various additions that conductors had marked in their rental scores over the years, as the work came to be played by ever larger ensembles. The rumors about Gershwin's deficiencies as an orchestrator also prompted Campbell-Watson to tamper with the scores of the *Concerto in F* and *An American in Paris*, and to assign others to tamper with those of *Second Rhapsody* and the *Variations on "I Got Rhythm."*

But the far superior score of *Rhapsody in Blue* that Grofé prepared for the Aeolian Hall concert, though still unpublished, has recently been recorded, by Michael Tilson Thomas (LP: CBS IM 39699; CD: CBS MK 39699) and also by Maurice Peress, in a very interesting recreation of the complete Aeolian Hall concert (LP: Musicmasters MMD 20113X/14T; CD: Musicmasters MMD 60113T). And the spurious score of *Second Rhapsody* has now been pulled out of circulation by Warner Brothers, the successors to Harms, in favor of Gershwin's original score, which Tilson Thomas also recorded for his CBS set. But, incredibly, the orchestral score of Gershwin's masterpiece, *Porgy and Bess*, has never been published in any form!

All this needs to be set right, and we need to have idiomatic, properly scaled performances of Gershwin's works—rather than the pretentious, overblown ones we have been getting ever since he was elevated to the dubious distinction of being America's great folk composer, a sort of musical equivalent of Norman Rockwell. Then, and only then, will we really get to know the man with whom Jablonski has worked so hard to acquaint us.

"Federation Judaism"

SACRED SURVIVAL: THE CIVIL RELIGION OF AMERICAN JEWS. By JONATHAN WOOCHER. *Indiana University Press. 254 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by JONATHAN D. SARNA

THE term civil religion, popularized by Robert Bellah in a seminal essay of 1967, commonly refers to the symbols, rituals, myths, and tenets that together comprise "the transcendent universal religion of the nation." In the United States, according to most of those who have studied the subject, civil religion rises above church and ethnicity to provide a measure of national cohesiveness and shared purpose —a taste of that "moral unity" which Emile Durkheim considered so essential both to religion and to society. Now the sociologist Jonathan Woocher has applied this concept to the Jews, a group which, although it participates in most aspects of the larger American civil religion (Christmas being the notable exception to the rule), also possesses, he claims, a civil religion of its own.

In this insightful and provocative volume, Woocher sets forth the terms of this "civil Judaism," "the constellation of beliefs and practices, myths and rituals which animates the organized American Jewish community today." Focusing on the "activity and ideology of the vast array of Jewish organizations which are typically thought of as 'secular,'" he discerns seven major tenets of the faith:

1. The unity of the Jewish people.
2. Mutual responsibility.
3. Jewish survival in a threatening world.
4. The centrality of the state of Israel.
5. The enduring value of Jewish tradition.
6. *Tzedakah*: philanthropy and social justice.
7. Americanness as a virtue.

He also speaks of three central myths "which the faithful tell one another" and which serve to translate what might otherwise be "abstract tenets" into "real events which happened and are happening still." The first and most important of these is "Holocaust to Rebirth," interpreted as "a paradigm for Jewish history and a continuous inspiration for Jewish action." The second is the theme of American Jewish exceptionalism, as demonstrated both in "the achievements of American Jews" and in the "striking philo-Semitic character of American society." The third and, according to Woocher, most vexing is "Jewish chosenness" (the only one of the three solidly grounded in Jewish tradition).

Myths and tenets, however, are not all. Civil Judaism, as Woocher defines it, also includes major rituals. In a few cases, like Sabbath observance and ritualized study, these are borrowed in altered form from traditional Judaism. But most, including "missions to Israel, retreats, major meetings and conferences" are entirely new, designed to forge feelings of group solidarity and to spur Jews to the kind of activism that civil Judaism demands.

AS SHOULD be clear from this summary, civil Judaism, for all that it reflects on the beliefs and practices of American Jews generally, cannot itself claim to be their collective faith. Most American Jews have never participated in the kinds of traveling missions and weekend retreats that Woocher writes about, and fewer still have ever attended the "major civil-religious ceremony," the annual general assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations. It is even questionable whether the basic beliefs of civil Judaism are shared by the community at large. Most for-

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mulations of "folk Judaism," including the one drawn by Charles Liebman in his *The Ambivalent American Jew* (1973), at least pay lip-service to theology; Woocher's list of seven tenets ignores the divine element altogether. On the other hand, *tzedakah*, defined as "philanthropy and social justice," plays a more significant role here than in other popular formulations.

The reason for these differences quickly becomes obvious. The faithful whose "religion" Woocher portrays here turn out to be an elect body, composed not of American Jewry at large but only of one small subcommunity: "the leadership of the American Jewish polity." Civil Judaism serves as the "institutional ideology" of this group, sacralizing its work by infusing it with transcendent meaning. To be sure, there is a relationship between the "religion" of the leaders and the religion of the led, but Woocher's contention that "civil Judaism provides the cement which binds together . . . American Jewry as a community" is clearly an exaggeration, as is his claim that the world view and ethos of civil Judaism are "persuasive to large numbers of Jews for whom they substantially define what it means to be an American Jew today."

Woocher's real focus in this book is, rather, on what might be called "Federation Judaism," the faith expounded and exemplified by those who play an active role in the work of the United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish federations across the country. As a description of Federation Judaism, indeed, this is a pathbreaking and highly original work, full of fresh and creative insights. Woocher carefully reads between the lines of the institutional pep talks given by Federation leaders and brilliantly illustrates how Federation Judaism as a whole seeks to resolve many of the basic tensions inherent in American Jewish life—the classic polarities "between Jew and non-Jew, survival and disappearance, community and individual, exceptionalism and normality, renewal and destruction, life and death." Nobody, to my knowledge, has examined this crucial aspect of American Jewish life from quite so enlightening a perspective.

Yet if *Sacred Survival* is fascinating and important, it is also deeply problematical for what it suggests about one possible direction that American Judaism might take. Civil Judaism, Woocher reports, "legitimates a way of being Jewish and a program of Jewish activity within which the role of the synagogue and the rabbinate—the life of study, prayer, and ritual observance—are no longer primary." Most Federation Jews, if they belong to a synagogue at all, are members in name only; they view its central activities as largely "devoid of genuine spiritual significance." Only 25 percent of those Woocher sampled believe that support for Jewish religious activities and institutions should be a high community priority. What is more, Woocher writes, civil Judaism offers its own, alternative rewards to those interested in Jewish religious experience, for "Federation-sponsored events provide occasions for religious exultation and inspiration which rival or surpass what is available in the synagogue."

For the most part, Woocher's purpose is to describe and understand, not to pass judgment. But in the last chapter he abandons the role of the religious sociologist and casts himself as the prophet of a new Jewish religious movement. The movement he advocates—he calls it "post-denominational" and "neo-Sadducean"—is a form of civil Judaism elaborated "into a more encompassing philosophy of Jewish existence," one that "places at the center of its world not Torah, but the Jewish people, and makes the maintenance and expression of Jewish peoplehood its primary religious obligation."

There are elements of Jewish secularism here, as well as elements of Zionism, and even elements of classical Reform Judaism, such as the "prophetic" call to penetrate "the structures of national and organizational life with the power of Jewish values." What is disturbing, however, is that Woocher sees this new faith operating less in the home, the synagogue, and the school—the traditional foci of American Judaism—than in the public square. Civil Judaism, he writes, is "a Judaism of the historical-political arena, of an elaborated polity and of public activism." Communal and political work, to his mind, should take on for the faithful the character of a "sacred calling."

Here, it seems to me, Woocher confuses a politically activist faith with political activism *as* a faith. It is one thing to strive to realize the social and religious ideals of Judaism within the polity at large; Judaism, like other religions, obviously seeks to mobilize its community (or communities) of believers on behalf of a vision of society. It is quite another thing, though, to make a religion out of social activism, to sanctify politics itself as a legitimate form of religious expression, and to call the result Judaism.

Robert Bellah put the issue well

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in his updated 1973 look at American civil religion:

> Religion and morality and politics are not the same things, and confusing them can lead to terrible distortions. But cutting all links between them can lead to even worse distortions. The concept of civil religion simply points to the fact that some links between them seem to exist in all societies. At its best civil religion would be realized in a situation where politics operates within a set of moral norms, and both politics and morality are open to transcendent judgment.

Transcendent judgment is precisely what civil Judaism, as Jonathan Woocher describes it, can never provide. That quality is simply not to be found in the workaday world of the Jewish polity. If there is to be "*sacred* survival," it must come from elsewhere.

The Speaker Speaks

MAN OF THE HOUSE: THE LIFE AND POLITICAL MEMOIRS OF SPEAKER TIP O'NEILL. By THOMAS P. O'NEILL, with WILLIAM NOVAK. *Random House. 387 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by DAVID BROCK

THE early 1980's were a dismal time for Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill. In the most memorable televised campaign spot of the 1980 elections, an O'Neill look-alike was cast as the ultimate Washington pol, driving an immense, sputtering gas-guzzler, wanting to spend, spend, spend, but short of the cash to refuel. The cigar-chomping, white-haired, 250-pound Democratic Speaker of the House became a favorite subject of cartoons, a caricature of everything anachronistic in American life.

O'Neill's image worked wonders for the GOP. After the Republicans swept the White House and the Senate in November, O'Neill's own party turned on him. "Repeal O'Neill" buttons proliferated. Representative Les Aspin wrote his colleagues that the aging New Dealer should be retired: "Tip is reeling on the ropes. . . . He's in a fog."

But the Republicans, eager to run against him, and the Democrats, eager to dump him, seemingly misjudged O'Neill. For while he had made his reputation as a savvy backroom operator who kept a keen eye on the next patronage contract and a low public profile, he emerged in his twilight to transform the insular speakership into a bully pulpit. In an age when most members of the House take marching orders not from the leadership but from interest groups outside the chamber, O'Neill became a public personality who solidified his ranks behind "bread-and-butter liberalism" in order to stave off the Reagan agenda. In this he proved a formidable foe; his public-approval rating jumped from 11 percent in 1980 to more than 50 percent by the time he left office last January. And so it is fitting that in retirement the rejuvenated O'Neill should have received an honorary degree from Harvard University, become a pin-up boy for American Express and Hush Puppies, and delivered, after a million-dollar advance, a memoir that has quickly climbed the best-seller lists.

The book is certainly an agreeable read, for O'Neill is a legendary storyteller. He captures well the flavor of machine politics in the days when he first entered politics fifty-one years ago, vividly recounts how legislative battles were won and lost, and has any number of tart observations to make about fellow politicians. A few examples: about the young John F. Kennedy, O'Neill writes, "Let's just say that in his early years in the House, he showed considerably more interest in his social life than in legislation." Harry Truman disliked Dwight D. Eisenhower because of his affair with Kay Summersby. Richard Nixon would complain bitterly after losing a few dollars in a poker game. " 'People love to see you carrying your own bags,' " O'Neill quotes Jimmy Carter telling him, revealing cynicism behind the former President's piety. Ronald Reagan, informed that a reconditioned oak desk in O'Neill's office had once belonged to Grover Cleveland, said "I once played Grover Cleveland in the movies"; Reagan was thinking of his role as Grover Cleveland Alexander, the baseball player in *The Winning Team.*

While the stories here are O'Neill's, it is noteworthy that this book was composed in the as-told-to form of the modern mass-marketed memoir, which enables the subject to recount his tale with a minimum of fuss to a writer—in this case, William Novak—who shapes it and fills in details. This approach works better, however, for Sydney Biddle Barrows, the "Mayflower Madam" who was Novak's last subject (Lee Iacocca was the one before that), than it does for Tip O'Neill, from whom one might reasonably have expected a somewhat more thoughtful book. The reader instead is inundated with a mix of schmaltz and blarney, too many statements like "government should do the right thing by the people" and "when the good Lord made James Michael Curley, He broke the mold."

THE lack of substance in this book may have to do with more than the fact that it was dictated, frequently on the run and in an obviously offhand manner. O'Neill draws no connection between his salty anecdotes and his political philosophy, and he may not know which one to draw. Perhaps what is most troubling about this memoir is its striking exposure of the failings of Tip O'Neill the political leader. The Speaker, unable to comprehend the vast political and social changes that have swirled around him for five decades, indeed may have lapsed into a fog from which he has yet to emerge.

O'Neill says, for instance, that the supporters of Eugene McCarthy's presidential candidacy in 1968 were "way-out flaky liberals," and confides that in 1972, when George McGovern defeated Edmund Muskie for the Democratic party nomination, "We got beat by the cast of *Hair.*" He fails either to see or to acknowledge, however, what the rise of the McGovern forces, culturally and politically so alien to himself and his constituents, meant for the party. Over 25 percent of the House seats changed hands in the elections of 1974 and 1976, and the House itself became

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DAVID BROCK, *a new contributor, writes on politics for* Insight *magazine.*

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a very different place as many big-city ethnic pols like O'Neill were replaced by issue-oriented liberals and radicals. The epicenter of the party lurched leftward, with the result that O'Neill's "little fella" voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and again in 1984.

For his part, O'Neill, following Sam Rayburn's motto—"to get along, go along"—endorsed reforms sponsored by the Democratic Left that sapped the power of committee chairmen in the House and paved the way for the present chaos, when on any given day even the lowliest freshman may arrogate to himself powers heretofore reserved for the President. Other consequences of the so-called reforms have included a rapid escalation in the number of congressional committees and especially subcommittees, a farcical budget process, the mishandling of sensitive information, and the emergence, in a micromanaging congressional staff, of a fourth estate. Congressmen have had less reason to maintain allegiance to the party and its mainstream constituencies, more to their special-interest backers. Thus the Democrats have been left standing at once for everything and for nothing. In a fulfillment of his lifelong ambition, O'Neill was elected Speaker of the House in 1977; he found himself holding the reins of a horseless carriage.

"Despite what many people believe, and what the Republicans want us to think," O'Neill writes,

> Reagan's victory in 1980 did not represent a revolution in American values. And despite what the media claimed, Reagan was not elected because people were fed up with the huge federal deficit and were clamoring for budget cuts. . . . I didn't buy the idea of a Reagan mandate then, and I certainly don't buy it now.

It would be a matter of some interest, then, to find out just how this long-time Democratic leader would explain the changed fortunes of his party, from indisputable dominance in the debate over the proper functions of government to a position at the margins. O'Neill celebrates his role in building Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and his later efforts to fend off Reagan's budget axe. Why were his last years in public life spent in such a defensive posture? O'Neill seems to be unaware that his idea of job-creation—a billion-dollar leaf-raking bill—is no longer tenable. He points out that the poverty rate fell from 50 percent in the 1930's to about 13 percent by 1980, but offers not so much as a hint that this in itself may require a reassessment of public policies. In the Reagan years, from his firm Democratic base in the House (thanks to gerrymandered congressional districts), the Speaker dug in his heels, adopted a demagogic style, and succeeded in frustrating the White House; hardly the stuff of leadership.

Curiously, there is little discussion of foreign policy in this book. O'Neill approvingly describes the secrecy surrounding appropriations for the Manhattan Project, of which only one committee chairman in the House was apprised, and also says he "agreed with Sam Rayburn's saying that politics stops at the water's edge—that when it comes to foreign policy, you support your President."

It must, then, have been a fascinating intellectual odyssey—though readers will not find its explication here—that brought O'Neill during the Reagan years to abandon any pretense of bipartisanship or even comity on matters of foreign relations. He led the charge of those congressional Democrats who have politicized (and even sought to criminalize) foreign-policy disagreements with the Reagan administration. In their zeal, this group has propounded the grossest distortions of the historical record, a prime example of which is O'Neill's own allegation that "no Americans were in danger" in Grenada. (O'Neill must know this assertion contradicts the report of a fact-finding mission to Grenada that the Speaker himself appointed.)

O'Neill brings about the same level of sophistication to bear on the civil war in Nicaragua; one does not have to be a supporter of the *contras* to expect better than his sole reference to them as "a small ragtag army of racketeers,

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murderers, and bandits." Without exception, on every disputed issue between the Congress and the Reagan White House in foreign policy, O'Neill came down on the side of American disengagement.

A civil tongue is not one of O'Neill's better qualities, but in his discussion of Ronald Reagan, whom he judges "the worst" President he has known, he displays both a flailing contemptuousness and genuine bewilderment. "We're roughly the same age, we're both of Irish ancestry. We're both sports buffs. We're both sociable and outgoing. We both come from modest backgrounds and had FDR as our hero as we came of age in the 1930's," O'Neill observes, baffled as to why the two ended up on opposing sides of almost every issue in the 1980's. O'Neill clearly has no grasp of the Reagan phenomenon, and this confusion fuels his stubborn anger. "It was sinful that Ronald Reagan ever became President," he concludes. Sin is for others to judge; but it is surely a shame that the Democratic party, adrift since Vietnam, had Tip O'Neill at the helm all those years.

Art and Culture

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND CRITICISM. By CLEMENT GREENBERG. Edited by JOHN O'BRIAN. *University of Chicago Press.* VOLUME I: PERCEPTIONS AND JUDGMENTS, 1939-1944. *270 pp. $27.50.* VOLUME II: ARROGANT PURPOSE, 1945-1949. *353 pp. $27.50.*

Reviewed by ROGER KIMBALL

CLEMENT GREENBERG is widely regarded as the most important art critic of his generation. Perhaps best known for his early and vigorous championing of abstract art, Greenberg was one of the first to appreciate the distinctive achievement of what has come to be known as Abstract Expressionism. Already in 1944, for example, Greenberg wrote that Jackson Pollock's second one-man show "establishes him, in my opinion, as the strongest painter of his generation." But Greenberg's stature as a critic does not rest simply on his prescient enthusiasm for artists like Pollock, David Smith, and Robert Motherwell. Indeed, it does not rest solely on *art* criticism of any stripe.

For Greenberg's passion has been not simply for art, but for the life of high culture generally, and though he has undoubtedly written more on the visual arts than on any other single subject, his career as a critic has embraced a wide range of topics. He began as a literary critic and translator (he was one of the first to translate works by Franz Kafka and Bertolt Brecht into English), and he continued to be a distinguished practitioner of both activities while also writing about art, politics, general cultural matters, and working as an editor. In short, Greenberg is the very embodiment of that nebulous phenomenon of which one has heard so much lately, the New York intellectual.

Born in the Bronx in 1909, Greenberg grew up in a Yiddish-speaking household. He has described his parents as "freethinking socialists," and, given his interests and the era in which he came of age, it seems only natural that his intellectual temper should have been formed by that heady mixture of avant-garde cultural convictions and socialism of the Trotskyist, anti-Stalinist variety which distinguished New York in the late 30's and early 40's. In other words, Greenberg's formative world was the world of *Partisan Review*, the world of writers like Dwight MacDonald, William Phillips, Philip Rahv, Harold Rosenberg, Meyer Schapiro, Lionel Trilling, and Robert Warshow.

In the late 30's Greenberg attended lectures by the German-born painter and teacher Hans Hofmann, a major if elusive influence on his thinking whom he later called "in all probability the most important art teacher of our time." Then in 1940, after having worked briefly in his family's dry-goods business, as a translator, and as a government clerk, Greenberg became an editor at *Partisan Review*. He began publishing in the *Nation* in 1941, becoming its regular art critic the following year, a post he held (with time off in 1943 for a brief stint in the army) until 1949. He also contributed essays on literature, art, and politics to other leading magazines and reviews, including the New York *Times Book Review*, Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*, and COMMENTARY, where he was an associate editor from 1945 until 1957.

For many readers, Greenberg is known only as the author of *Art and Culture*—a slim but deeply influential collection of thirty-seven essays and reviews published in 1961—and a handful of other uncollected essays and monographs. Altogether, however, this represents but a small fraction of his published work. Happily, John O'Brian, who teaches in the fine-arts department at Harvard, has undertaken to collect Greenberg's criticism in the form in which it was originally published (many of the essays in *Art and Culture* were substantially revised by Greenberg, often obscuring their original impetus). The first two volumes, which bring together over two-hundred items, have recently appeared, and they contain Greenberg's essays and criticism from 1939 through 1949. An additional two volumes will contain his criticism from 1950 through 1969. O'Brian has provided an introduction and notes, and has appended a chronology that traces Greenberg's career through 1949.

GREENBERG's first published criticism, a brief review of Bertolt Brecht's *A Penny for the Poor*, appeared in the Winter 1939 issue of *Partisan Review*. This was followed the next fall by "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," one of Greenberg's most ambitious and still most widely read essays. Though marred by occasional graceless writing and ritual descents into Marxist jargon, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" already announces several themes that were to become central to Greenberg's concern as a critic. There is, first of all, the notion of historical inevitability, borrowed from Hegel via Marx: the age demands the avant-garde, demands an art that turns away from repre-

ROGER KIMBALL's *article, "Beyond Abstract Art?," appeared in our March issue.*

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sentational "subject matter" to explore its own medium and processes of fabrication. There is also the opposition of avant-garde art to its antonym: kitsch, an omnibus term that Greenberg employs to describe "ersatz culture" and an art that depends on mechanical formulas to produce "vicarious experience and faked sensations."

Here, as in later pieces, Greenberg's main crusade is against stagnation and "Alexandrianism" in art, or the twin vices of "academicism and commercialism." Above all, "Avant-garde and Kitsch" sets the stage for Greenberg's later work in its insistence that looking at these phenomena involves "more than an investigation in aesthetics." Just as kitsch carries with it the suggestion of the spiritually meretricious and inauthentic, so the avant-garde, by contrast, appears as an almost heroic effort to forge something vital and genuine in an age inhospitable to the rigors—spiritual as well as aesthetic—of high culture. From the very beginning of his career, in other words, Greenberg held that the fate of cultural life in the modern age is inextricably bound up with the fate of serious art.

Equally central to Greenberg's thinking is the proposition that, in the words of the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, "Not everything is possible at all times." For Greenberg, too, every age produces its own particular aesthetic demands, and artists ignore those demands at the peril of artistic enervation and obsolescence. "The imperative," he writes in "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940),

> comes from history, from the age in conjunction with a particular moment reached in a particular tradition of art. This conjunction holds the artist in a vise from which at the present moment he can escape only by surrendering his ambition and returning to a stale past.

It is in this context—the context of what the age demands—that we must understand Greenberg's famous insistence on purity and abstraction in art. "Purity in art," he writes, "consists in the acceptance . . . of the limitations of the medium of the specific art. . . . The arts . . . have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated, and defined." As Greenberg's language suggests ("hunted back," "isolated"), this process of concentration and definition, though in some sense ineluctable, is nevertheless not wholly welcome. It involves a loss as well as a gain. What is lost is the richness and variety and accessibility of traditional representational art. What is gained is the possibility of genuine cultural achievement unadulterated by sentimentality, manufactured feelings, or kitsch.

Greenberg later softened these views somewhat, admitting that "Art is under no categorical imperative to correspond point by point to the underlying tendencies of the age." But he continued to feel that abstract art represented the most fertile stream of contemporary art, "the only stream," as he put it, "that flows toward an ocean." More generally, he continued to hold that the age had its imperatives and limitations and, stringent as they might be, one's best approach was to acknowledge them honestly. As he wrote in an important essay in 1948: "Our most effective course is to confront the situation as it is, and if it is still bad, to acknowledge the badness, trusting in the truth as the premise of any improvement, and feeling a new security because of the very fact that we have met and ascertained the worst."

Greenberg's insistence on facing up to modernity, as it were, is one of the most powerful aspects of his criticism, and one that emerges with new clarity when reading through these volumes. But allegiance to this model of historical inevitability has drawbacks as well as advantages. Among other things, it puts one in the embarrassing position of appearing to dictate to history—and then, of course, of having to contrive elaborate explanations of why reality refuses to conform to the schedule laid down by the theory.

In Greenberg's case, the drawbacks expressed themselves more in the political than the aesthetic realm. At least through the mid-40's, he was wont to load his criticism, especially his longer pieces, with Marxist-inspired exhortations. Citing Trotsky in 1940, for example, he tells us that "in order to keep democracy there must be a socialist revolution. . . . We must choose: either capitalism or democracy." By 1948, however, Greenberg was speaking of himself as "an ex- or disabused Marxist," and the truth is that despite his penchant for socialist rhetoric, he has always insisted on the relative autonomy of art and the aesthetic sphere. The pieces collected in these volumes testify that Greenberg's judgment as a critic remained uncorrupted by subservience to the Marxist program.

In the more narrowly aesthetic sphere, Greenberg's embrace of the model of historical determinism gave his pronouncements about the necessity for abstract art a sometimes unwarranted zeal and assurance; as we look back on the period, it is not clear that the aesthetic choices were quite so limited as Greenberg made out. Nevertheless, by and large he did not let his theory of art history dictate his taste. In fact, the scores of exhibition reviews collected here reveal above all a sensibility capable of responding freshly to an extraordinarily wide range of artistic expression, classical as well as contemporary, figurative as well as abstract. Enjoyment, a spontaneous reaction of pleasure, this was his ultimate criterion of judgment.

It is precisely this concern for what might be called the living experience of art that led Greenberg to deplore the shallow parody of high culture that was embodied in "middlebrow" taste: the easy, superficially educated judgment that appropriates the gestures of serious art without grasping the experience or authentic feeling that validates them. Middlebrow culture, he writes, "attacks distinctions as such and insinuates itself everywhere, devaluating the precious, infecting the healthy, corrupting the honest, and stultifying the wise."

Thus it should not be surprising that Greenberg, for all his proselytizing for abstract art, was not an unthinking champion of the new. By the late 40's, he was already

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speaking of "the stabilization" of the avant-garde, what he would later disparagingly call "avant gardism"—an art that merely aped the outward forms of the avant-garde without possessing its essential spirit or its foundation in living experience.

One of Greenberg's greatest strengths as a practical critic is his ability to call attention to an artist's faults and weaknesses without failing to do justice to his merits; indeed, he realizes that an artist's merits sometimes *depend upon* his weaknesses. Thus, he speaks of Delacroix's "indispensable" faults (above all, a certain muddiness) or criticizes "the practice of wholesale appreciation, which remains the bane of art writing today."

This rejection of "wholesale appreciation" gives Greenberg's criticism a certain severity and appearance of ungenerosity, but it also means that his praise is worth something. Writing about the distinguished American poet Randall Jarrell, for example, Greenberg notes that he

> has the talents, the sensitivity, the wisdom, and almost everything else that the good fairy can give. He is one of the most intelligent persons writing English at the moment. . . . But . . . he seems to have a blank personality. He is swallowed up by his gifts.

These are hard words, but Greenberg is right about Jarrell, and one cannot help thinking that the poet, himself a master of the penetrating critical *mot*, would have grudgingly approved of the verdict. (I am reminded of Jarrell's comment in 1955 that anyone who reads and writes about many books is bound to be disappointed by how few he likes; "yet really," he continues, "he should be uneasy at liking as many as he does. Posterity won't.")

READING through these volumes, one is naturally struck by how much the art world has changed since Greenberg's heyday. It was much smaller and more intimate in the 40's and 50's than it has since become, and—one cannot help feeling—far more serious and vital. The blights of commercialism and academicism that Greenberg excoriated have by now installed themselves as the dominant forces. But there are some things that, perhaps because they were so bad to begin with, never seem to change. It would appear that one such dubiously predictable phenomenon is the Whitney Annual, forerunner of today's notorious biennial. "This year's Whitney Annual," Greenberg wrote in 1944, "is more disheartening than ever"; "a new low," he observed the following year. He discerned "enormous improvement" in the 1947 Annual, but the next year the exhibition had lapsed back to its "old mediocrity." *Plus ça change.*

While Greenberg is still generally recognized as one of the giants of 20th-century criticism, there is a considerable irony attached to his current reputation. Because he has stressed purity and the abstract qualities of art, he is often branded a formalist, uninterested in anything except arcane questions of artistic technique; because he has stressed the relative autonomy of aesthetic experience, he is sometimes dismissed as an aesthete, unattuned to the social and historical dimensions of art. But the truth is that for Greenberg criticism has always been "more than an investigation in aesthetics." There is always another dimension: moral, spiritual—call it what you will. Thus the Marxist art theorist Rosalind Krauss is quite right when she sniffs that for Greenberg "criticism has everything to do with value and almost nothing to do with method."

But this remark, meant as a denigration, in fact points to one of Greenberg's most conspicuous strengths. A concern with "value" over "method" shows itself in various ways throughout his writing, but at bottom it shows itself as a refusal to subordinate life to art. Responding to the controversy surrounding the 1948 award of the Bollingen Prize for poetry to Ezra Pound, for example, Greenberg noted that he had no quarrel with the aesthetic judgment of the award panel, but that "Life includes and is more important than art, and it judges things by their consequences." "In any case," he wrote,

> I am sick of the art-adoration that prevails among cultured people, . . . that art silliness which condones almost any moral or intellectual failing on the artist's part as long as he is or seems a successful artist. It is still justifiable to demand that he be a successful human being before anything else, even if at the cost of his art. As it is, psychopathy has become endemic among artists and writers, in whose company the moral idiot is tolerated as perhaps nowhere else in society.

This is one of many passages in Greenberg's writings that speak with an absolutely contemporary voice.

At least through 1949, when these volumes conclude, what one misses in Greenberg's criticism is a more sustained exposition of the critic's underlying ideas. By far the greatest number of pieces collected here are brief reviews—notices, really—often no more than a page or two. This format has the indisputable advantages of freshness and immediacy, but it also has the distinct liabilities of cursoriness and, at times, of superficiality. Nevertheless, Greenberg reveals himself throughout as a critic unusually alive both to the experience of particular works of art and to the overarching question of the fate of art and high culture in the modern age.

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